

Strategic ASSESSMENT

Volume 20 | No. 1 | April 2017

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and Implications for Immigration Policies in the West**

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Björn Brenner

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The Trump Administration, the Middle East, and the Kurds

Zachary Pereira

Bill for Recognition of the Arab Minority as a National Minority

Doron Matza and Muhammed Abu Nasra

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Alon Rieger and Eran Yashiv

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in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question"**

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The F-35 and Israel's Security Concept

Ilan Shklarsky

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Volume 20 | No. 1 | April 2017

Abstracts | 3

**Support for Terrorism in Muslim Majority Countries
and Implications for Immigration Policies in the West | 7**
Russell A. Berman and Arno Tausch

**The Deradicalization of Islamists by Islamists:
Hamas's Kid Glove Approach to Salafi Jihadists in the Gaza Strip,
2010-2014 | 23**
Björn Brenner

**An Independent Iraqi Kurdistan?
On the Prospects and Viability of a Future State | 35**
Gallia Lindenstrauss and Adrien Cluzet

The Trump Administration, the Middle East, and the Kurds | 47
Zachary Pereira

Bill for Recognition of the Arab Minority as a National Minority | 59
Doron Matza and Muhammed Abu Nasra

The Syrian Economy: Current State and Future Scenarios | 71
Alon Rieger and Eran Yashiv

**The UN Security Council, Israel, and "the Situation
in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question" | 83**
Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky

The F-35 and Israel's Security Concept | 97
Ilan Shklarsky

Strategic ASSESSMENT

The purpose of *Strategic Assessment* is to stimulate and enrich the public debate on issues that are, or should be, on Israel's national security agenda.

Strategic Assessment is a quarterly publication comprising policy-oriented articles written by INSS researchers and guest contributors. The views presented here are those of the authors alone.

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Printing: Elinir

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Strategic Assessment is published in English and Hebrew.
The full text is available on the Institute's website: www.inss.org.il

Abstracts

Support for Terrorism in Muslim Majority Countries and Implications for Immigration Policies in the West

Russell A. Berman and Arno Tausch

The wave of elections in key European Union states in 2017 invites intensified debates concerning immigration and terrorism. This article discusses data from reliable recent opinion surveys that indicate that 8.3 percent of the inhabitants of the Muslim world hold sympathies of some degree for the Islamic State. A hypothetical electoral majority of 52 percent of the entire Arab world also agrees that “United States interference in the region justifies armed operations against the United States everywhere,” which connotes significant support rates for terrorist groups competing with the Islamic State (al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah). However, as there are also large sections of the Arab and Muslim publics that do not support terrorism, it is difficult to draw unequivocal conclusions regarding these publics or to derive a simple formula for refugee or immigration policies from these figures.

Keywords: terrorism, Western Europe, United States, Arab countries, Muslim world, opinion surveys, Islamic State

The Deradicalization of Islamists by Islamists: Hamas’s Kid Glove Approach to Salafi Jihadists in the Gaza Strip, 2010-2014 Björn Brenner

The Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip first set out to crush the area’s Salafi jihadist groups by force. Once Hamas realized that the Salafi jihadi problem was more serious than it had first anticipated, however, Hamas’s approach shifted gradually, from a strategy of attempted elimination to one of containment and assimilation. Indeed, several of the pursued militants proved to be former colleagues from the Qassam Brigades who had grown disillusioned with Hamas and defected to fringe groups. This article examines how Hamas, as part of a new and progressive approach, aimed to rehabilitate these individuals by enrolling them in a prison-based deradicalization program that sought to appeal to a common ideological

and religious base in Islam, treating Salafi jihadists as patients rather than as common criminals.

Keywords: Hamas, Gaza, Salafi, jihadist, Islamist, deradicalization

An Independent Iraqi Kurdistan? On the Prospects and Viability of a Future State

Gallia Lindenstrauss and Adrien Cluzet

Since the 1991 Gulf War, and even more so, following the Iraq War of 2003, the Kurds of Iraq have gained a growing level of autonomy and control of their region's affairs. In context of the longstanding Kurdish aspiration for independence, this article focuses on whether the Kurds of Iraq are ripe to proceed to the next step and declare independence. The article will examine the achievements that the Iraqi Kurds have already made toward establishing a Kurdish independent state in northern Iraq and address the challenges that still lie ahead. Specifically, the issues of political unity and institution building, the economy and energy dimensions, the situation of the security forces, and the level of international support for the idea of independence will be addressed.

Keywords: Kurds, Kurdish Region, Iraq, Turkey, Iran

The Trump Administration, the Middle East, and the Kurds

Zachary Pereira

This article analyzes the US-Kurdish relationship in light of the election of Donald Trump, and examines the different variables that must be considered as President Trump formulates a policy toward the Middle East and the Kurds. The article argues that President Trump has two core interests in the Middle East: to eliminate the Islamic State and to contain Iran. Both these policies will impact on the Kurds, and to this end certain Kurdish and American interests align, particularly in the opposition to the Islamic State. However, while they will fight the Islamic State when the Islamic State threatens Kurdish interests, the Kurds have shown little interest in expanding their efforts beyond Kurdish territory and fighting the organization in non-Kurdish territory. Furthermore, given the tensions between Kurdish political actors, any external assistance to the Kurds could lead to increased inter-ethnic tensions. Regarding President Trump's second interest of containing Iran, it is highly unlikely that any Kurdish political

actors would pursue policies that are openly hostile toward Iran, as the Kurds do not currently perceive Iran as a major threat to their interests.

Keywords: Trump, Kurdistan, Iraq, Syria, Iran

Bill for Recognition of the Arab Minority as a National Minority Doron Matza and Muhammed Abu Nasra

Since 2001, the Arab Knesset factions have proposed bills for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority. The wording of the bills insists on the right of the Arabs to suitable representation in state institutions, the establishment of representative political institutions, cultural and educational autonomy, consolidation of the status of the Arabic language, and participation of the Arab minority in significant decision making related to its affairs. This essay assesses the background to the respective proposals, and argues that what lies behind the would-be legislation is the ongoing process among the Arabs in Israel of forming a collective national identity along with anxiety about the continual undermining of their status caused by government policy towards them. These bills reflect a defensive strategy in which the minority is driven to defend its rights by putting these rights on the national agenda. The political establishment in Israel should therefore regard the Arab bills as a warning signal about the direction of relations with the Arab minority, which is losing its foothold in the Israeli public arena.

Keywords: Arab minority, national minority, Arabs, national identity, discrimination, Jewish-Arab relations

The Syrian Economy: Current State and Future Scenarios Alon Rieger and Eran Yashiv

This article outlines the main features of the Syrian economy prior to the current civil war, and documents the principal economic developments in the course of the conflict. This serves as the background for an analysis of possible future scenarios for the Syrian economy, which will likely take decades to recover its (poor) pre-conflict status. The physical and human capital costs are such that hundreds of billions of dollars will likely be required to rebuild the economy. This means that under the best of circumstances Syria will need a very long period of time to regain even the difficult situation it had before the civil war.

Keywords: Syrian economy, post-conflict reconstruction

The UN Security Council, Israel, and “the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question”

Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky

How do the most powerful actors in the UN Security Council perceive the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the resolution of the conflict, and what, if any, are the differences of opinion between them? Furthermore, which issues attract the most debate and fiercest criticism in Council discussions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? To address these two central questions, discourse analysis is performed on the protocols of UNSC meetings under the agenda item “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” from 2012 to 2016 (n=70 items). Findings show that there are crucial issues on which key players appear to be in full agreement with Israel, alongside eight central issues that draw unrelenting criticism.

Keywords: UN Security Council (UNSC), Israel international standing, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, UNSCR 2334, settlements, P5 states

The F-35 and Israel’s Security Concept

Ilan Shklarsky

The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (“Adir,” in its Hebrew nomenclature) is the first fifth generation combat aircraft in the Middle East, and a cornerstone of the IDF procurement plan for the coming decade. This essay assesses the compatibility of the F-35 with the Israeli security concept early in the 21st century. Using parameters such as the security concept, IDF strategy, and characteristics of modern military systems, a comprehensive analysis of the aircraft’s strengths and weaknesses is presented. Despite frequent criticism of the aircraft’s high cost, performance, and malfunctions, the plane is clearly suited to the Israeli emphasis on deterrence and to a general war. While the F-35 does not constitute a substitute for remote controlled aircraft and the quantitative aspect of fourth generation aircraft, it is likely to provide a qualitative solution to the many challenges expected to face Israel.

Keywords: security concept, IDF strategy, F-35 aircraft, force buildup

Support for Terrorism in Muslim Majority Countries and Implications for Immigration Policies in the West

Russell A. Berman and Arno Tausch

The Wind of Change across Europe

With elections in 2017 in key European Union states (France: presidential, April 23, second round May 7, National Assembly, June 11, second round June 18; Germany: Federal Diet, September 24; Netherlands: Second Chamber, March 15),¹ an intensified debate about migration to Europe and Middle East terrorism – its origins, trajectories, dangers, and the extent of its mass support – is highly likely. Marine Le Pen, leader of the far right Front National in France, predicted that European elections in 2017 will bring a wind of change across the region.² With the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump’s US presidential victory, far right political parties throughout Europe are now capitalizing on Euroscepticism and anxieties about migration.³

German Chancellor Angela Merkel appears to have responded to Le Pen’s challenge by defending her own refugee policy as an act of moral and legal obligation by a “state of laws,” while asserting that Europeans must stand by the principle of offering asylum to all those fleeing war and oppression.⁴ The fact that the Berlin terrorist Amis Amri was shot in Milan, Italy, after crossing several European borders following his attack in the heart of Germany, where he had previously applied for asylum, further fuels the controversy about the alleged failures of existing European refugee, immigration, and security policies.⁵

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The debate intensified because Merkel's decision to welcome hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa during the summer and fall of 2015 was designated "a catastrophic mistake" by Donald Trump.⁶ Similar to right wing European populist opposition politicians, who are poised to benefit from the upcoming European elections, Trump asserted that "people don't want to have other people coming in and destroying their country." Trump's own election campaign rhetoric included a call to ban Muslims from entering the US until "our representatives" find out "what the hell is going on there."⁷

To shed light on "what is going on there," this article examines selected open sources regarding attitudes toward terrorism, terrorists, and other extremist groupings. This social scientific evidence paints a complex picture. On the one hand, it finds considerable support for terrorism among large sections of Arab and Muslim publics, although the support is not at all uniform or undifferentiated. On the other hand, despite considerable hostility toward the United States and Israel, there are large sections of the Arab and Muslim publics that do not support terrorism. It is therefore difficult to draw unambiguous conclusions regarding these publics or to derive a simple formula for refugee or immigration policies. It is not, however, difficult to recognize significant levels of support for terrorism, which could presumably justify certain restrictive refugee and immigration policies.

Reactions by incumbent Western political leaders to the Trump's administration's first attempt at a travel ban against nationals from Libya, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, and Sudan in late January 2017 were quick and predictable.⁸ Merkel said that she "regrets" the move.⁹ Her opposition was echoed throughout Europe, as well as by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. However, even as these voices were criticizing the US administration's efforts to limit entry for a temporary period, European states, including Germany, were taking their own steps (with Turkish cooperation) to reduce the inflow of refugees and accelerate deportation processes of individuals whose applications for refugee status were denied.

Despite Merkel's criticism of the Trump administration's restrictive immigration policy, Europe arguably stands at the dawn of a post-global and Eurosceptical era driven by nationalistic movements that have developed in response to increased immigration from Africa, Asia (including Turkey), and even parts of Europe itself (the Balkans, for example).¹⁰ The rise of centrifugal movements in key EU countries, the argument runs, reflects the weakening of the pan-European spirit and the gains of extreme nationalism

at its expense.¹¹ The severe economic crisis that has particularly affected Europe's south since 2008 and threatens the very existence of the European Monetary Union is not the focus of this essay, but it has certainly amplified these centrifugal tendencies.¹²

Europe's Low Effectiveness in Fighting Terrorism

Europe's effectiveness in combating terrorism has frequently been diagnosed as inadequate.¹³ Solid evidence is mounting with regard to the devastating nature of global Islamist terrorism and its thousands of victims each month, from Nigeria to Southeast Asia and also, increasingly, in Europe.¹⁴ A recent survey by the French Daily *Le Monde* reported that in Europe alone, there have been 2239 victims of Islamist terrorist attacks since 2001.¹⁵ At the same time, an intellectual climate remains that is predisposed to minimize or even deny the reality of the low intensity guerrilla warfare carried out by Islamist groups against the Western democratic order.¹⁶ The German newspaper *Südkurier*, for example, went so far as to assert that in Germany it is more likely to be struck by lightning than to be killed by a terrorist attack.¹⁷ Obviously statistics can be manipulated to trivialize any danger or to suggest that one should regard terrorist deaths like lightning, an unavoidable natural phenomenon. Such hiding one's head in the sand, however, is the worst strategy for confronting international terrorism.¹⁸ Instead we propose proceeding empirically by discussing some new international survey results about the genuine extent of support for terrorism in the Arab world in particular and in the Muslim world in general. Is it 1 percent, 10 percent, 30 percent, or 50+1 percent?¹⁹

Statistical Data on Arab Support for Terrorism

The essay relies on the statistical analysis of open survey data and is based on the commonly used statistical software IBM SPSS XXIV, utilized at many universities and research centers around the world.²⁰ The program contains nearly the entire array of modern multivariate statistics,²¹ and any researcher should be able to arrive at the same results as we do here. Clearly the analysis below provides only a first attempt to measure "support" for terrorism, and later research on the subject should distinguish between different types and degrees of support for terror.²² However, the available data allows researchers to distinguish between those who strongly support terrorist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, and al-Qaeda, and those who say that they just "support" these terrorist organizations. From the

available data, one could develop fine-tuned social profiles of strong terror supporters on a country by country basis.

The sources used in this article are:

- a. The *Arab Opinion Index* of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha, Qatar.²³ Since 2012, this think tank has published regular professional surveys of public opinion in the Arab world, and the 2015 *Arab Opinion Index* is the fourth in a series of yearly public opinion surveys across the Arab world.²⁴ The 2014 *Index* was based on 21,152 respondents in 14 Arab countries, and included 5,466 Syrian refugee respondents living in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and northern Syria along the Turkish-Syrian border. The 2015 *Index* is based on the findings from face-to-face interviews conducted with 18,311 respondents in twelve Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania. Sampling followed a randomized, stratified, multi-stage, self-weighted clustered approach, giving an overall margin of error between +/- 2 percent and +/- 3 percent for the individual country samples. With an aggregate sample size of 18,311 respondents, the *Arab Opinion Index* is currently the largest public opinion survey in the Arab world.
- b. The Arab Barometer, *Wave III*. This openly available original survey data allows researchers free direct access to the original data for multivariate analysis.²⁵ The third wave of the Arab Democracy Barometer was fielded from 2012-2014 in twelve countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian territories, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen. Like the first and second waves, the third wave seeks to measure and track civilian attitudes, values, and behavior patterns relating to pluralism, freedom, tolerance and equal opportunity; social and inter-personal trust; social, religious, and political identities; conceptions of governance and the understanding of democracy; and civic engagement and political participation. Data from the third wave became publicly available in the fall of 2014.²⁶
- c. The Pew Spring 2015 Survey.²⁷ The survey, conducted from March 25 to May 27, 2015, is based on 45,435 face-to-face and telephone interviews in 40 countries with adults 18 and older.²⁸

Because of the current importance in the fight against global terrorism, the first question concerns rates of explicit support for the Islamic State. To be sure, a verbal expression of support is not identical with a willingness

to provide material support or to participate directly in terrorist activities; nonetheless the size of the supportive cohort provides an approximate indication of the base from which the Islamic State could potentially draw future militants. Since “don’t know” and “refused to answer” distort the final picture of the survey results, the focus here is on the valid answers.²⁹

8.3 Percent of Muslims Worldwide Support the Islamic State

Table 1 summarizes the available estimates of Islamic State favorability rates (strong support + some support), compiled from the Pew and ACRPS data:

Table 1. Support for the Islamic State³⁰

Country	% support for the Islamic State among the adult population in the country
Lebanon	1.0
Israel	1.7
Iraq	2.0
Jordan	2.0
Saudi Arabia	2.0
Tunisia	2.0
Indonesia	4.0
Kuwait	5.0
Turkey	7.5
Burkina Faso	7.8
Morocco	8.0
Algeria	9.0
Egypt	9.0
Senegal	10.7
Pakistan	11.0
Sudan	11.0
Malaysia	11.2
Nigeria	14.0
Mauritania	20.0
Islamic State support in total Muslim world as extrapolated from support in the surveyed countries	8.3 %

18 Percent of Syrian Refugees Sympathize with the Islamic State; 30 Percent Want a Theocratic State

According to the ACPRS data, support for the Islamic State among Syrian refugees in the Middle East is 18 percent.³¹ The ACPRS Syrian refugee poll was based on respondents from 377 population centers inside and outside official refugee camps registered by the UNHCR. The sampling procedure was a multi-staged clustered approach with an error margin of ± 2 percent. This analysis of Syrian refugee opinion is the largest of its kind in the region, and also reveals that at least 30 percent of the interviewed representative Syrian refugees want a religious state as a solution to the conflict, while 50 percent prefer a secular state, and 18 percent are impartial (2 percent did not know or declined to answer).³²

No survey to date has examined the political opinions of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who entered Europe since the onset of the European refugee crisis in the summer of 2015, so the ACPRS survey results, which clearly suggest that nearly every fifth Syrian refugee sympathizes with the Islamic State, and every third wants a religious state (based on *sharia*), can potentially have a considerable impact on political debates in Europe. Yet without a definitive survey of the population that arrived in Europe, it is not possible to exclude the hypothesis that those refugees differ on these points from those who remained in the Middle East.

Evidence shows that 8.3 percent of the surveyed population in Muslim-majority countries hold sympathies or even strong sympathies for the Islamic State. This would imply a potential of more than 80 million Islamic State supporters.

A Long Asymmetric War Ahead?

Beyond the data on Syrian refugees, evidence shows that after properly weighting the data for population sizes of the different countries concerned, 8.3 percent of the surveyed population in Muslim-majority countries hold sympathies or even strong sympathies for the Islamic State. This would imply a potential of more than 80 million Islamic State supporters, again with the qualification that verbal expression of support should not be equated with a credible predisposition to participate in violent militancy. If Table 1 also properly reflects the opinion structure

of the Muslim world in general, the numbers suggest a milieu³³ of some 130 million people who constitute the global hard core of the Islamic State support. Compare this to the comparatively small number of the 50,000 hard core Roman Catholic Northern Irish men and women who voted for

the political wing of the terrorist organization IRA, the Sinn Féin Party, through the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond among a total Roman Catholic Northern Irish population of half a million people. The IRA could mobilize some 1500 to 2000 fighters on the terrorist front, and the British military, arguably one of the best trained and equipped armies in the world, had to deploy no fewer than 15,000 to 20,000 soldiers to conduct this asymmetric warfare, only to arrive at a standstill after decades of fighting and bloody conflict.³⁴ The lesson from Northern Ireland regarding the size of the military response relative to the scope of popular support suggests the need for enormous resources to mount an effective response to contemporary Islamist terrorism. Of course the cases are in many ways not comparable, given the topography, the political context, and the profound changes in military technologies.

52 Percent of All Arabs Favor Terrorism against the United States; 48 Percent Oppose

Data indicates that more than that nine out of ten Muslims around the world do not support the Islamic State, which suggests that policies that target all Muslims would be inappropriate and could run the risk of pushing the non-supporters into the supporting camp. Nonetheless the population that does in fact express support for the Islamic State is numerically large. Moreover, support for the Islamic State is only one indicator. Table 2 summarizes data in response to a broader question, with results demonstrating that 52 percent of the entire Arab world, based on the surveys in twelve countries and weighted by population size, agree or even strongly agree that “United States interference in the region justifies armed operations against the United States everywhere.” To be sure, 48 percent of the Arab population reject or strongly reject this proposition, and are willing to say so to an unknown interview partner. There may well be additional opponents of anti-US violence who are nonetheless unwilling to disclose their position for fear of retaliation. However if that speculation would suggest raising the 48 percent by an unknown supplement, a corollary methodological skepticism could operate in the other direction: clandestine supporters of anti-US violence who hide their opinion in order to evade potential consequences. Although the

The immigration-friendly camp must recognize that there is a nearly 10 percent support rate for the Islamic State and, with regional variation, higher support for other Islamist groups generally associated with terrorism.

two shadow figures may not be of equal size, they cancel each other out as methodological speculations. Ultimately one can claim that the Arab world is evidently split on the willingness to view violence against the US as justified, and it is similarly clear that parts of the population prepared to support such violence nonetheless oppose the Islamic State, i.e., one can oppose the Islamic State but still advocate violence against the US.

Table 2. Mass Support for Anti-American Terrorism in the Arab World (valid percentages and population weighted totals, in percent)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Agree + Strongly Agree
Algeria	40	37	15	10	77
Palestinian territories	19	42	34	5	61
Kuwait	13	47	29	12	60
Morocco	12	42	28	18	54
Sudan	19	35	28	19	54
Iraq	14	38	31	16	52
Population weighted total (total Arab World)	17	35	27	21	52
Jordan	17	33	32	17	50
Lebanon	23	26	18	34	49
Egypt	11	37	26	26	48
Tunisia	13	30	29	30	43
Libya	17	25	40	18	42
Yemen	16	21	30	32	37

Note: Responses to the question by the Arab Barometer Survey: "United States interference in the region justifies armed operations against the United States everywhere"

Support for Specific Terrorist Groups

Table 3 analyzes the support rates for several terrorist groups competing with the Islamic State in the Middle East: Hamas, Hezbollah, and al-Qaeda, with similarly equivocal results. On the one hand, overall terror support rates in the entire State of Israel now reach two digit levels (in the case of Hamas and Hezbollah), and with even 4 percent in the case of al-Qaeda and 2 percent in the case of the Islamic State.³⁵ On the other hand, only in one Middle East country (Jordan) does one single terrorist group (Hamas)

command an absolute majority of support, while in all the other surveyed countries and territories, neither Hamas nor Hezbollah (let alone al-Qaeda) attracts majority support. Majorities in Arab countries evidently oppose demagoguery, chauvinism, and violence.

Table 3. Support in the Middle East for Specific Terrorist Groups (percent)

Country/ Territory	Palestinian territories	Israeli Muslims	Jordan	Lebanon	Turkey	[Israel]
Very favorable or somewhat favorable opinion of Hamas	44	38	52	30	15	11
Very favorable or somewhat favorable opinion of Hezbollah	39	40	13	42	11	11
Very favorable or somewhat favorable opinion of al- Qaeda	20	14	8	1	9	4
very favorable or somewhat favorable opinion of the Islamic State	7	6	3	0	9	2
Average terror group favorability rate	27	25	19	18	11	7
N =	823	243	905	971	656	921
Margin of error +-% at 95% confidence level	from 1.7 to 3.4	from 3.0 to 6.2	from 1.1 to 3.3	from 0.6 to 3.1	from 2.2 to 2.7	from 0.9 to 2.0

Source: Pew Spring 2015 Survey

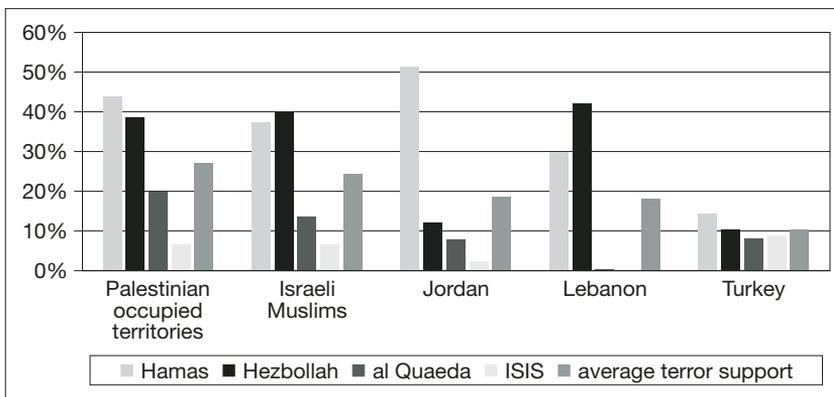
A final question concerns whether or not religious minority groups in the Middle East fit into the larger picture. Statistical methodology demands extra care in evaluating the results from the small samples that generated the following results.³⁶ Nonetheless, the results for the Christian minorities in the Middle East may be surprising to those who assume that Christians in the Middle East might be immune to radical Arab nationalism.³⁷ In Egypt,

some 30 percent of the 50 interviewed Christians³⁸ hold open sympathies for terror strikes against the United States as “revenge” for their policies in the Middle East, and in Lebanon, 43.40 percent of the interviewed 440 Christians hold this view.³⁹ Among the Christians in the Palestinian territories, the same sentiment seems to apply.⁴⁰ It may be the case that with regard to anti-Americanism, Christian populations in the region behave like their Muslim compatriots, although the dynamics in the individual settings may differ, which would require more textured, qualitative research.

Conclusions and Prospects

This article attempts to provide a differentiated picture of terror support rates among populations in the Arab world and in the Muslim world in general. The available surveys on the one hand suggest that among Syrian refugees in the Middle East, there is a considerable rate of support for the Islamic State – 18 percent. The analysis of Syrian refugee opinion also reveals that no fewer than 30 percent of the interviewed representative Syrian refugees prefer a religious state as a solution to the current conflict. Such results suggest that for some refugees, opposition to the Assad regime could produce aspirations for an Islamist outcome, for which the Islamic State represents one of several competing vehicles. Figure 1 presents a final synopsis of the empirical results.

Figure 1: Support for Terror in the Middle East



Source: Pew Spring 2015 Survey and authors’ statistical evaluations of the original data (valid responses only)

In conclusion, the data presented here drawn from several public opinion polls presents a complex picture of support for terrorism in the Arab world. It is likely that this complexity will disappoint both extremes in the intensifying debate in Europe and the US concerning refugees, immigration, and terrorism in an increasingly polarized political terrain. It is clear that the vast majority of the polled populations oppose the Islamic State, indicating that a “Muslim ban” would not contribute to the effort to defeat the Islamic State and could well be counterproductive by nourishing the Islamic State narrative that the West is Islamophobic. This conclusion obviously runs counter to the anti-immigrant claims of the national populist politicians, such as Trump, Le Pen, Wilders, and others. Yet the immigration-friendly camp must recognize that there is a nearly 10 percent support rate for the Islamic State and, with regional variation, higher support for other Islamist groups generally associated with terrorism. Even if such evidence is understood to count those who are only prepared to provide verbal support, rather than violent participation, the size of the cohort with violent inclinations remains disturbing. It would therefore not be unreasonable to exercise some caution in refugee and immigration policy, be it through efforts to screen for radical sympathies, no matter how difficult such “vetting” will turn out to be, or through the establishment of safe zones, to reduce the refugee or immigrant inflow.⁴¹ The overall size of the population indicating some support for violence indicates that the international system will face security problems from this front for the foreseeable future.

Notes

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The Deradicalization of Islamists by Islamists: Hamas's Kid Glove Approach to Salafi Jihadists in the Gaza Strip, 2010-2014

Björn Brenner

By 2009, below the surface of public denial, the growing Salafi jihadist presence in Gaza aroused much concern within Hamas and was closely monitored, even though the Hamas government's official response was a firm refusal to acknowledge the slightest concern. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh rejected allegations in the international media of any global jihadi presence in Gaza, insisting, "There are no extremist organisations or groups on Gazan soil."¹ However, in conversations in more informal settings, Hamas leaders admitted that their internal concerns over the issue were growing.²

In 2010, the Hamas government communicated these concerns to the external wing of the movement. According to a letter sent from the Gaza leadership to the Hamas politburo in Damascus, the extensive efforts at reconciliation until then were seen as failures, and a harsher approach was suggested, with the goal of eliminating the extremist groups entirely.³ Another letter, sent by Ahmed Jaabari, at the time the commander-in-chief of the Qassam Brigades, to the head of the politburo, Khaled Mashal, warned him of the potentially deteriorating situation in Gaza.⁴

Apart from the 2009 proclamation of an Islamic caliphate in Rafah and other incidents, there were some ominous signs of a more broadly based violent radicalization underway in Gaza. For instance, for three

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consecutive years, the UNRWA summer camps for children were vandalized by unknown attackers. These mixed-gender camps were disliked by the Salafis, who advocated strict gender separation. The police officers who came to investigate the attacks were reported to have arrived late on the scene and showed a tepid interest in resolving the cases. These recurring attacks, together with the slow reaction of Hamas's police forces, revealed a certain mutual empathy between the radicals and the police. Some observers even argued that the Hamas government deliberately allowed the Salafi jihadists to carry out their attacks as a way of fulfilling the more extreme sections of the movement's Islamization agenda. This symbiosis, whether deliberate or accidental, nevertheless showed that Salafi jihadist ideals were not restricted to an extreme segment of society, but were shared by civil servants and some ordinary Gazans. The increased support for the Salafis among broader sectors of society was likewise more visible in the streets of Gaza's southern towns. In Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis, and Rafah, men wearing the *shalwar qamis* (Asian-inspired dress worn by the Afghan mujahidin)⁵ became part of everyday life on the streets.

Hamas's fear of the emerging challenge posed by the Salafi jihadist groups was seen, for instance, in the way the government accelerated the introduction of Islamic values in Gaza. In 2009, the Ministry of the Interior announced new rules concerning women's dress codes, behavior, and gender separation.⁶ However, some of the new rules – for instance, the obligatory hijab for female university students on campus and for female lawyers in the courts, and a ban on women smoking shisha in public places – proved quite unpopular with Gazans. Following protests, the Hamas government quickly retracted these new rules and reformulated them as “recommendations.”⁷ This soon became a recurrent pattern. When its Islamizing measures were met with opposition, the government would blame the institutions concerned (for instance, schools), claiming that the new rules had originated from them and did not come directly from the ministries.⁸

On the one hand, coping with the Salafi jihadists through a policy of appeasement was an impossible balancing act. Satisfying Salafi jihadist demands for the Islamization of the public sphere and retaining the support of large segments of Gazan society were incompatible demands. On the other hand, the alternative of head-on confrontation, as occurred during the 2009 incidents in Rafah, did not appeal to ordinary Gazans. While some Gazans supported using force against the Salafi jihadists, many argued that

“it is forbidden to kill a Muslim. It doesn’t matter if he is a Salafi jihadist or not; it’s *haram* to use violence against any brother.”⁹

As Hamas was striving for improved control over the internal security situation, and at the same time seeking to enhance its popular support, it nevertheless looked as though either approach – appeasement or confrontation – would result in further alienating one or both of the parties concerned.

Fact-finding and a Novel Approach

There was a need for fresh thinking on the part of the government, and by this point it was apparent to Hamas that many of the local Salafi jihadists came from the established political factions, and even from within Hamas’s own ranks.¹⁰ The government responded by appointing a fact-finding commission consisting of respected religious scholars and psychologists from within as well as outside its own movement.¹¹ Its mission was to investigate the roots of the Salafi jihadist phenomenon in Gaza and determine how it could be dealt with more successfully. The commission’s final report described the present member base of Hamas, profiled the kind of recruits it should be seeking, and recommended constructive ways of addressing radicalization when it occurred.¹² The report became the basis for a new approach to the Salafi jihadists.

As statements by police and security officials revealed, the objective of the new approach was “to embrace, not alienate.”¹³ It was based on relatively progressive heart-and-mind principles, which in several respects resembled measures for dealing with violent radicalization that had previously been adopted in other Muslim-majority entities, notably the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia. As opposed to its earlier vacillation between appeasement and confrontation, the Hamas government now adopted a more comprehensive approach to the problem. The old policies were not thrown away, but the new approach sought to combine the two existing tactics with an additional component. The strategic goal was no longer to eliminate the Salafi jihadists, nor to sweep the problem under the rug. Through innovative means such as monitoring, respectful treatment, dialogue, and religious debate, the Hamas government opted for containment of the Salafi jihadist problem and possibly even the rehabilitation of the individuals involved.

The commission’s report concluded that the local Gaza presence of Salafi jihadists was not primarily due to radicalization among the existing

Salafi community. Rather, the problem lay within the political factions themselves.¹⁴ The majority of Salafi jihadists were found to be young and current (or former) members of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah seeking alternative ways of channeling their despair and lack of hope in the future.

In late 2009, with the goal of containing these individuals and hopefully bringing some of them back into the fold, Hamas began conducting audits of its cadres in all areas of the movement, religious as well as military. One cornerstone of this new approach was the new power given by the government to its Ministry of Religious Endowments over Gaza's Islamic infrastructure.¹⁵ The activities of mosques, religious charities, and other Islamic associations were thoroughly scrutinized.¹⁶ Employees were audited and mosques under Salafi influence were either shut down or had their imams replaced by people trained by and loyal to Hamas.

This auditing process was relatively aggressive. Little distinction was made between Salafi and Salafi jihadist congregations. Peaceful Salafi associations such as Dar al-Kitab wal-Sunna felt that their work was made difficult as a result of the government's imposition of new restrictions and the withdrawal of some of its licenses to carry out dawa activities.¹⁷ One of their mosques in Jabaliya was stormed and closed by the government (but later reopened). Hizb ut-Tahrir in Gaza, which had a stronger political profile than the other Salafi associations, was dealt with in an even harsher manner.¹⁸

Financial inducements were used as an effective instrument to control the mosques. By offering the board overseeing the congregation more money if it accepted a certain cleric as its imam, the Hamas government felt that it could influence its agenda, as well as the message and tone of the imam's sermons.¹⁹ While this approach was not completely new, it now became broadly applied to all of Gaza's Islamic associations. A congregation's financial situation was crucial as it directly affected the number of employees it had and the amount of dawa activity it could carry out.

At the same time, audits were also conducted within the Hamas movement itself. The most thorough review was carried out in the Qassam Brigades, which was noted in the commission's report as one of the major sources for Salafi jihadist recruitment.²⁰ In 2010, the Qassam Brigades temporarily put all membership applications on hold and began inspecting its existing members, monitoring their loyalty, piety, and any suspicious behavior.²¹ Examples of suspicious behavior included using *takfiri* language (denouncing infidels), condemning items and individuals as *haram* (forbidden) or *kuffar*

(infidels), wearing Salafi clothes, and having more than one wife.²² Fighters who were suspected of Salafi jihadist sympathies had their memberships frozen and were further investigated by the *amn al-haraka*, the movement's own unit for internal security.²³ As the revocation of membership meant being banned from participation in any of Hamas's activities, it was tantamount to exclusion from social life at large.

As part of the new approach, religious re-education was offered to those Qassam fighters who were excluded in this way. Following this process, if they were deemed ready to be re-accepted as members, they were offered re-employment.²⁴ In the past, when fighters had been dismissed, they were usually left humiliated to face their families and friends on their own. Among Gazans, suspension from the Qassam Brigades was commonly understood to mean that the individuals concerned had failed to follow the Brigades' Islamic principles. It was therefore especially shameful for those affected, and it is not surprising that this group had for the past few years been a major source of recruitment for the Salafi jihadist groups.

These ex-Qassam fighters were particularly vulnerable and receptive to the recruitment attempts of new groups, as they were strongly motivated to prove themselves to society, both to demonstrate their religious credentials and to show their willingness to continue to fight the occupation.²⁵ For those members who succeeded in passing Hamas's audit, obligatory courses in Islamic morals and ethics were also on the table. These courses were part of the "vaccination" component of the new approach, aimed at strengthening members' religious knowledge. For both the excluded and remaining fighters, the rigorous audit process was followed up by Islamic re-education.

The harsh albeit educative and rehabilitative approach taken toward its own rank and file was mirrored in the way in which the Hamas government handled those individuals who were already active in the Salafi jihadist groups. By initially seizing their arms and arresting their leaders, Hamas sought to remove the elements necessary for the Salafi jihadists to continue their militant activities. They were then forbidden to appear in the media or to give interviews. Moreover, the Salafi jihadists were also forbidden from taking part in armed resistance activities against Israel, and at times were confined to their homes – in effect, house arrest.²⁶

However, there was an additional, softer, element to the government's handling of these dissidents as well. Unless they had been arrested for involvement in a particular incident, their detention periods were shortened

to less than a week at a time and they were given special treatment in jail.²⁷ Human rights abuses were relatively rare and these detainees were held in a separate detention center with higher standards than the Strip's ordinary prison facilities.²⁸ While repression remained one of the means by which the Hamas government continued to handle the Salafi jihadists, the adoption of a novel approach based on containment and attempted rehabilitation was also an important part of the response.

Disengagement, Deradicalization, and Rehabilitation

In discussions about the Salafi problem, senior leaders in Hamas would often reiterate that even the Salafis were Muslims and they were all part of the same community.²⁹ In addition, the Hamas government frequently expressed its view that Salafist jihadism was not merely a criminal activity, but rather a question of "illness" and poor mental health in need of a "cure." According to Minister of Health Basem Naim: "You can arrest all the addicts. But this will not solve the problem. You have to convince people not to take drugs. You have to prevent the recruitment of more addicts."³⁰

Based on this perception and the conclusions of its fact-finding commission, the Ministry of the Interior assigned its Political and Moral Guidance Commission to draft a comprehensive package of measures for curing the Salafi "addicts" – Hamas's own version of a prison-based deradicalization program.³¹ The new program was not merely a local product designed in Gaza and carried out in isolation from the movement's politburo in exile. On the contrary, politburo members shared local concerns about the threat posed by the Salafi jihadist phenomenon. Hamas leader Izzat al-Rishaq, for instance, concerned about the situation, explained what was being done: "We try to treat their way of thinking, to convince them to leave the al-Qaida thoughts, by discussion and arguments. Maybe we will succeed, maybe we will fail. I think that if the situation continues as it is today I'm afraid we cannot persuade anybody that our way of political participation will lead to any result."³²

In parallel, the Hamas administration began construction of five new detention centers for Gaza's 1,200 security detainees, which included the Salafi jihadists.³³ The basic process of detention for all security prisoners consisted of two phases. The first phase involved a period of detention with the security forces for information gathering purposes, followed by transfer to a detention center. During the second phase, the detainee was usually bound to stand trial. However, the Salafi jihadist prisoners were arrested

and released on a more fluid and regular basis, commonly without standing trial. Where present, human rights abuses associated with interrogation generally took place during the first phase with the security forces, rather than in the detention centers.³⁴

As part of Hamas's novel approach, the interrogation methods used on the Salafi jihadists were less harsh than those applied to other detainees. For example, the security forces would only hold a Salafi jihadist (without blood on his hands) in detention for a few days, while others regularly remained in detention for months at a time.³⁵ While common criminals suffered torture, such as having their nails pulled out and the bottoms of their feet beaten, Salafi jihadist prisoners were beaten with sacks over their heads.³⁶ When a detainee had completed his period of interrogation by the security forces in the central al-Ansar facility (or sometimes in smaller field offices), he was passed on to one of the detention centers.³⁷

All Salafi jihadist detainees, whether or not they agreed to participate in the deradicalization program, were held together in one detention facility apart from other detainees.³⁸ Although failing to measure up to any comparable standards, this facility was a converted apartment bloc where the former apartments had been remodeled into cells and redesigned to meet the needs of detention.³⁹ In contrast to most other prison-based deradicalization programs, for instance in Saudi Arabia, the Gazan Salafi jihadists were not inducted into the program on a voluntary basis: counseling sessions were an obligatory part of detention. Refusal to participate in the sessions was punished with solitary confinement.⁴⁰ In addition, Saudi Arabia only offered its program to detainees without blood on their hands, who were sympathizers and who could more readily be seen as accessories misled by radical rhetoric.⁴¹

Hamas's Program Curriculum

In contrast, Hamas's deradicalization program included all detainees and was delivered in three main curricular blocs. Two blocs were taught inside prison while the third one was delivered following the detainees' release. The first bloc of the program consisted of a series of religious counseling sessions. As in the Saudi equivalent, these sessions were led by senior Islamic scholars, highly respected in the community and across the political spectrum. This approach differed from the kind of deradicalization education carried out in some other Islamic countries. In Indonesia, for instance, it was stressed that counseling had to be conducted by former

Salafi jihadists who were already reformed, as “radicals will only listen to other radicals.”⁴² According to the head of the corrections division at the Indonesian Ministry of Justice, Muhammed Sueb, a Salafi jihadist was most likely to change his ideas when confronted by a peer. Any other religious scholar would be viewed with suspicion.⁴³

The Hamas government, however, chose the Saudi approach, and the scholars it selected were either affiliated with the movement, such as Shaykh Sulayman al-Daya, or Salafi and affiliated with the *Dawa salafiyya* (the non-violent Salafi movement), such as Salma Dias and Omar Hams.⁴⁴ Some of them had lengthy service records with the Qassam Brigades. The most prominent scholars were used by the Hamas government for sensitive and religiously based mediation work with the detainees.

All the religious scholars involved in the program accepted the Muslim Brotherhood’s understanding of Islam, that is, the view that Islam must be re-interpreted in the light of the contemporary and local context in which believers find themselves. However, as a group they were religiously conservative and even sympathetic toward the Salafi position. As analyst Nathan Thrall observed, “The imams that work with Hamas and go to the prisons look exactly like Salafi jihadists themselves, in their look, their dress, even their Saudi perfume that lacks alcohol. They share many of [the ideological Salafi] beliefs but are not anti-Hamas. They are part of the movement but not playing the same game as the Salafi jihadists. [These] imams’ political views are in line with Hamas, but in their personal lives they are closer to the Salafis.”⁴⁵

The religious scholars engaged with the detainees through lectures, one-on-one sessions, and group seminars. The sessions began with the scholars listening to the experiences and views of the detainees. They then moved on to a traditional form of religious dialogue, with the goal of re-educating the subjects to accept Hamas’s interpretation of Islam.⁴⁶

The second part of the program was political and involved lectures and group sessions with Hamas leaders from the movement’s political echelon. They addressed the relationship between Islam and politics, explaining to the detainees why the movement had chosen to participate in parliamentary politics and how this choice fit in with Islam. In particular, they addressed the issue of Islamizing Gazan society, a process that Salafi jihadists criticized as proceeding too slowly. The Hamas leaders explained the need for gradualism in Islamizing society, assuring their audience that their ultimate goal was also a society based on *sharia* rules, but to be

achieved at a slower pace.⁴⁷ This political element was a local adaptation that differed considerably from other existing deradicalization programs.

The third and final part of the program sought to engage the Salafi jihadists after their release from detention. Upon release, they had to sign pledges not to violate truces agreed between Hamas and Israel or to engage in any activities that compromised Gaza's internal security.⁴⁸ The former prisoners received regular home visits by security officers who continued to monitor them. In addition, at regular intervals they were brought in for a few days of detention and questioning and then released again.⁴⁹ Some were under house arrest when at home, while others were allowed to move around Gaza freely. The religious counseling they received was followed up on a regular basis; home tutoring was carried out by the same religious scholars who had sat with the detainees in their cells. These individual sessions were also supplemented by additional group counseling.⁵⁰

Furthermore, released militants were offered inducements to renounce violence. According to Ansar al-Sunna leader Muhammad Talib, for instance, Hamas had offered him money and a new job in the government service. Those Salafi jihadists who were former members of the Qassam Brigades were usually offered a higher rank if they agreed to return to military service.⁵¹ While the Hamas program used measures such as re-employment and financial inducements, it put less emphasis on supporting the detainee's family and seeking their assistance to prevent him from relapsing into violent behavior. However, upon question, Hamas's Ministry of the Interior maintained that it did offer families practical assistance, particularly with resolving intra- and inter-family conflicts while their relative was in detention.⁵²

Hamas's Kid Glove Approach: Proof of Flexibility

Hamas's perception of the Salafi jihadist groups was twofold. On the one hand, it saw them as a military threat to its rule and position in power. On the other hand, Hamas appeared to have a special kinship with the Salafi jihadists that was manifested on the religious level. Although their activities in Gaza were seen as a threat to internal security, the Salafi jihadists were not dismissed as mere criminals but rather seen as misguided Muslim brothers in need of religious re-education. This also included the view that they could be "turned" if only taught the "right" interpretation of Islam.

Hamas's novel approach included giving up its former objective of eliminating the Salafi jihadist groups entirely and opting for containment

instead. Hamas sought to appeal to the common ideological and religious base in Islam that it shared with the Salafi jihadists. While they were still treated harshly when arrested and interrogated, detained militants were treated more as patients – their cells were more comfortable than those of other detainees and they generally endured shorter periods of detention. Hamas’s most progressive measure was its introduction of the prison-based deradicalization program. By this, Hamas displayed pragmatism in devising measures that went far beyond the obvious and traditional. This gentler rehabilitation approach was reminiscent of the ways in which several Western countries were likewise addressing the problem of violent radicalization.

Hamas’s deradicalization program carried some of the hallmarks of similar programs in other countries – where they were commonly considered to be an expression of democracy. However, while treating the Salafi jihadists as patients might have looked democratic at first glance, these “democratic” practices were implemented in combination with repressive methods that lacked any concern for human rights. Hamas’s softer measures were not driven by any increased respect for the individual per se but by its own immediate need to find effective methods to handle this emerging threat. Nonetheless, this proof of Hamas’s ability to alter its tactics, from coercive to persuasive, should nevertheless be read as a display of the Islamist group’s far-reaching flexibility and pragmatism.

In terms of its actual effectiveness, Hamas’s deradicalization program never yielded the results that the government had hoped for. One of the reasons for its failure was Hamas’s over-confidence in which types of individuals it believed it would be able to deradicalize. Best practices from other prison-based programs had shown that usually only lower level sympathizers and helpers responded positively to deradicalization attempts, with leading members much less so. Hamas’s program, however, took on Salafi jihadists of every stamp, and thus the prospects of success were bleak from the outset. In addition, given the deep radicalization beyond Hamas’s own ideology that had taken root in parts of Gazan society, most of the radicalized individuals who were enrolled in the program had already passed the critical point of no return.

When asking the Gazan Salafi jihadists themselves what they thought about the level of success of Hamas’s deradicalization efforts, they dismissed this program as no more than devious attempts at indoctrination, failing to set up any real dialogue. According to “Abu Muaz,” a leader of the Salafi

jihadist group Tawhid wal-Jihad: “ Hamas tries to brainwash us jihadist in prison. But we don’t listen just because they come to talk to us on the inside. Maybe if you came to my house or met with me in the mosque we could talk. But I can’t listen to you while you are holding me by force. Concerning the pledge we needed to sign about refraining from any further armed activities, I just signed because I wanted to get out of prison. I was not convinced by any of that.”⁵³

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An Independent Iraqi Kurdistan? On the Prospects and Viability of a Future State

Gallia Lindenstrauss and Adrien Cluzet

In February 2016, Masoud Barzani, President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, announced his desire to hold a referendum among Iraqi Kurds on the issue of independence. While he did not promise that the results would dictate an immediate declaration of independence, he did state that such a referendum will reveal the wish of the people, and will be realized “at the appropriate time and circumstances.”¹ An informal referendum already took place in 2005, in which 99 percent of those who voted supported independence, and the idea for a formal referendum surfaced in 2014. A referendum is likely to result in a sweeping majority of Kurds favoring an independent state. As Mustafa and Aziz note, “The idea of having a sovereign Kurdistan is so popular that it is hard to find a single Kurd who would oppose it.”² Hence the question arises, what will be Barzani’s steps following such a vote. Opposition elements inside the Kurdish Region have charged that Barzani will use the referendum to bolster his own legitimacy as president. Yet irrespective of his political ambitions, the Iraqi Kurds’ aspiration for independence is strong.

This article examines how far the Iraqi Kurds have moved toward gaining independence and establishing a Kurdish independent state in northern Iraq, and will assess the likelihood of Barzani declaring independence. Beyond the issue of the Iraqi Kurds’ demands for self-determination, these questions bear on the fear of Kurdish independence that has been a long time concern for countries with a significant Kurdish minority in the region; many have invested much effort in quelling such ambitions.

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With the weakening of Baghdad's central authority and the prominent role of the Kurds in the struggle against the Islamic State, never has Iraqi Kurdish independence been discussed so much. As to political orientation, a Kurdish independent state in northern Iraq will likely be a pro-Western state with a favorable attitude toward Israel.³

The article will address the issues of political unity and institution building, economy and energy dimensions, the situation of the security forces, and the level of international support for the idea of independence, in order to assess the viability of an independent entity, if indeed the Iraqi Kurds move toward it. A unilateral declaration of independence is a possible but not likely prospect for the Kurdish Region. Another way for the region to gain independence is by agreement with Baghdad (a type of "South Sudan" model), or if Iraq as a state completely disintegrates.⁴ Indeed, in March 2017 President Barzani said, "Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have faded away, as happens today to the legacy of Sykes-Picot."⁵ There is also the possibility of the Kurdish Region gaining independence and trying to form a greater Kurdistan, but this seems to be a very unlikely scenario and hence will not be discussed.

Political Unity and Institution Building

Of the many challenges to political unity that have long confronted Iraqi Kurdistan, most still exist. In 2005, the new Iraqi federal constitution granted the Kurdish region a legal autonomous status. It stipulated that "Kurdistan's institutions exercise legislative and executive authority in many areas, including allocating the Regional budget, policing and security, education and health policies, natural resources management and infrastructure development."⁶ This power extends over four governorates (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk, and Halabja) of Iraqi Kurdistan. The parliamentary regime of the region gives powers to the President, elected by universal suffrage, and to the Prime Minister, who is appointed by the elected Parliament.

Despite this relative institutional emancipation, however, the Kurdistan Region has never been fully able to gather together the different Kurdish parties and reach fundamental agreement on many issues. These difficulties, regularly exploited by external powers, are partly related to the tribal division in Kurdish society. It has proven difficult to deepen political unity because of some clan differences, and the lack of political unity is also linked to the various spoken dialects; the two main dialects are Sorani (Arabic script)

and Kurmanji (Latin script). At the same time, most Kurds understand both dialects,⁷ and in any case, tribal divisions and dialect differences, while hindering unity, have not prevented other states from forming or from basic performance. In addition, from 2014, the advances of the Islamic State have acted to some degree as a unifying element, although as the organization has weakened, its unifying effect has decreased.

These divisions were one of the main reasons behind the civil war among the Kurds in the 1990s, bringing into conflict the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). The memory of this civil war resonates in the region, the scars are still palpable, and the Iraqi Kurds want to avoid a return to domestic conflict. The KDP was established in 1946, thanks to Soviet-backing against the Iraqi and Iranian monarchies. Now based in Erbil, capital of the Kurdish Region, it is considered the most influential party within the region, thanks to the role of both President Barzani and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. The PUK was born out of a split in the KDP in 1975 and since its creation has been based in Sulaymaniyah. Its formation was inspired by Ibrahim Ahmad, former member and intellectual of the KDP-I (the Iranian branch of the KDP), and the Talabani family influence in it is very strong.⁸

Today, the main differences between these two parties are fanned by recent political developments. Beyond the inheritance of divisions and conflicts, the PUK accuses Barzani of not respecting the democratic game, and denounces the illegality of Barzani's continuing role as President.⁹ This division has caused the blocking of any presidential election since 2013 (postponed to 2015, then to 2017). Moreover, the 2013 parliamentary election gave rise to a new political party. The Gorran ("Change") party, which defines itself as opposed to the ruling two-party coalition (PUK-KDP), came second (after the KDP and before the PUK), highlighting a possible evolution of Kurdish society vis-à-vis this inner crisis. Others, however, claim that the rise of Gorran mostly reflects a division within the PUK.¹⁰ These elections also gave 12 parliamentary seats (out of the 100 seats that were open)¹¹ to three Islamist parties, thereby indicating the growing importance of the Sunni identity.

The regional positioning of the Kurdish Region, between various spheres of influence and within a country at war for almost 15 years, makes achieving political stability difficult. This instability and intra-societal differences complicate the task of strengthening democratic institutions. In the various fields where the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has the freedom to

act, the government has had difficulties in finding a political consensus and in legitimizing newly founded domestic institutions. These difficulties are also related to problems of corruption and nepotism in the Kurdish Region. The KRG has planned a deep restructuring of the current institutions and their operations for 2017, and it remains to be seen if it succeeds in this goal.

Energy and Economy

In the post-Saddam period, many international oil companies arrived in the Kurdish region,¹² perceived as “the last big onshore ‘easy’ oil province.”¹³ Still, while oil revenues have facilitated the economic development of the region, the previous estimations regarding the Kurdistan Region’s oil and gas reserves have overstated the amount of exploitable resources.¹⁴ If the Kurdistan Region declares independence without a prior agreement with Baghdad and issues concerning the legality of the region’s oil exports remain unresolved, it is likely that uncertainty will continue to deter major international companies from investing further in the region. There has already been disappointment with the real returns on prior investments of these companies. However, should the region reach understandings with Baghdad, it will be able to sell its oil at a higher price, as the current price reflects a discount the KRG must give to compensate for the legal risks the buyers are taking on themselves.¹⁵ As the Kurdistan Region is landlocked, it relies on Turkey to export its oil. There are calls (especially among the PUK) for the need to diversify the possible outlets for the Kurdistan Region’s oil and to use Iran as well as a possible future outlet.

In 2015, the KRG began facing difficulties paying salaries to the 1.3 million employees on its payroll. Note that the total workforce in the Kurdistan region is around 2 million, which testifies to a problem of an inflated public sector. There are several reasons for the economic problems. Since 2014, because of the Kurdish Region independent sale of oil, Baghdad has reacted with a halt on budget payments from the central government. The declining energy prices have also been one of the major causes of the growing debt of the Kurdistan Region. Another issue has been the resources needed to pay for the handling of over 1.8 million Iraqi displaced people and Syrian refugees arriving in the Kurdish Region after the major advances of the Islamic State (marking some 30 percent of the region’s population). In addition, the price of the military struggle with the Islamic State has put pressure on the KRG budget.¹⁶ Not being a state entity has also made it harder for the region to obtain international loans, although

the struggle against the Islamic State has brought about a first direct loan from the United States to the KRG to pay the salaries of the Peshmerga armed forces. Opposition sources, however, claim that the crisis mainly results from the uncertain destination of the oil revenues, which in turn raises charges of corruption.¹⁷

The KRG has made some efforts to carry out economic reforms in the region. While not cutting the number of employees in the public sector, salaries have been reduced. Also, the low oil prices have been used to begin removing subsidies on gasoline and, with World Bank funding, a much needed overhaul of the electrical infrastructure is planned.¹⁸

Security Forces Dimension

Related to the political consensus necessary for the construction of common public institutions is the organization and the efficiency of security forces. Within the region, several agencies are supposed to control public order and ensure homeland security, including Peshmerga army forces, Zeravani forces (a type of gendarmerie), police, Asayish (intelligence agency), emergency, and anti-terror forces.¹⁹

The two veteran political parties (KDP and PUK), formerly militias, are known for keeping powerful security forces. Although all Peshmerga forces are officially subordinated to the KRG Presidency Council (the cabinet) and its Peshmerga Ministry, and article 121 of the Iraqi Constitution and Kurdistan Region's laws allow only one single and unified force as the regional guard force (the Peshmerga army), the two forces remain subordinate to separate PUK and KDP commands. Moreover, many civilians possess weapons in their home, adding to the lack of full control of the KRG over the security dimension. One estimate in 2009 put the number of PUK Peshmergas at 42,500 soldiers and KDP Peshmergas at 54,700, plus 30,000 former KDP Peshmergas transferred to Zeravani militarized police, officially under the Iraqi Interior Ministry orders.²⁰ Today, and with its reservists, the Peshmerga army is estimated to have between 150,000 and 200,000 fighters.²¹ Legally financed by both KRG and Baghdad, the Peshmerga army's budget is a matter of dispute between these two sources, and payments of the soldiers' salaries constitute a source of negotiating leverage for Baghdad.

The war against the Islamic State revealed some of the weaknesses of the Peshmergas.²² Their equipment and effectiveness depend in many respects on Western countries' support allocated since the war against the Islamic State began, as weapons originating from the former USSR

and Yugoslavia are beginning to be sorely lacking in effectiveness.²³ On the other hand, the war against the Islamic State has made the Peshmergas important allies for the international coalition against the Islamic State.

The Peshmerga's effectiveness is questioned by many experts. The prevailing picture in the media of a very effective Kurdish army is the result of real achievements against the Islamic State but also of a successful public relations campaign and the excessive glorification of the female combatants. However, many of these successes occurred in Syria and were registered by the Syrian offshoot of the PKK (YPG), not by the Iraqi Peshmergas. The armed forces of the KRG remain very much dependent on Western support, without which the Peshmergas will find it difficult to impose their will on the ground.

International Legitimacy and Support

The independence of the Kurdish Region is closely linked to foreign support and to international legitimacy, and thus to the interest of global and regional powers not to block Kurdish independence and even to assist it. Located in a war-torn country and in a region of economic and geopolitical significance, the fate of Iraqi Kurdistan is very important for Turkey and Iran, for major Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, and for the world superpowers as well. There are currently 34 foreign consulates in Erbil, including representatives from all the major powers.²⁴

The regional powers have exploited divisions within the Kurdish Region. While the PUK has been backed by Iran for many years, the KDP is pulling the KRG towards a strong relationship with Turkey. As an important ally for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, both in his struggle against the PKK and as part of Turkey's attempt to counter Iran's sphere of influence in Iraq, Barzani has held multiple meetings with Turkish leaders over the years. Aside from the economic aspect of this relationship, the backing it receives from Turkey in the regional context is essential for the KRG. For Erdogan, beyond achieving more diversification of Turkey's energy supplies, this alliance represents a way to show that he is not against the Kurds in general but rather only against the PKK. In 2010, Ankara opened a consulate in Erbil, and there have been negotiations about the opening of a KRG representation in Ankara.²⁵ In February 2017, during Barzani's visit to Turkey, the Kurdistan flag was hoisted next to the Turkish and Iraqi flags on several occasions, a move that was criticized by the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), but defended by the ruling party.²⁶ This relationship

remains very much unbalanced, vital for Erbil but of secondary importance for Ankara.²⁷ Moreover, the intensification of the conflict with the Kurdish minority in Turkey also puts a strain on the relations with the KRG.

The Iranian neighbor is positioning itself to oppose Kurdish independence, much more so than Ankara. Indeed, Iran is afraid of the spreading and strengthening of the drive for independence among its own Kurdish and other minorities. In December 2016, accusations surfaced that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were responsible for double bomb attacks against KDP-I's offices in Erbil.²⁸ Tehran is also afraid of an instrumentalization of the Kurdish cause by its rivals, such as Saudi Arabia. Several Iranian officials asked Saudi Arabia to remove its diplomatic representation from Erbil, which opened in February 2016.²⁹ That was somewhat ironic, since Iran has two consulates in the Kurdistan Region (in Erbil and in Sulaymaniyah). Nevertheless, a top Iranian commander has called on Saudi Arabia to leave Erbil because its presence is destabilizing.³⁰ Iranians are also wary of a loss of their interests in favor of the Turks within the Kurdish Region. With that in mind, they have increased their backing of the PUK.³¹ Iran seems clearly opposed to the independence of the KDP-led Kurdish Region, which represents a red line for Tehran. Still, it is not clear whether Iran will use its military power to halt a Kurdish drive for independence (especially if such a state earns US backing), although they will certainly invest much effort in weakening such an entity.³²

The US has opposed Kurdish independence, especially since the 2003 War, because it saw it necessary to keep Iraqi borders intact. However, as Iraq's instability persists and even worsens, there are calls inside Washington to rethink its policies. It is quite clear that the Kurdish state will be a friendly actor to the US and that if the US chooses to give such a state security guarantees, this might well deter the Iranians from acting militarily against it.³³ The US already has small deployments of forces in the region.³⁴ Russia's position toward the Kurds is complex. Traditionally, Russia has had friendly relations with the Kurds and was one of the first countries to open a consulate in Erbil.³⁵ Moscow, however, opposes a unilateral decision by Erbil to declare independence and will support an independent Kurdish state only if that emerges with the consent of

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Baghdad. There is also a linkage between the situation in Syria and Iraq, and an Iraqi Kurdish precedent of seceding from the Iraqi state would not be received well in Damascus and in Tehran, whose position on the matter may affect that of Russia. It is likewise unclear that a Kurdish state, which will be pro-Western, is in the best interest of Russia.

While Israeli support is not expected to significantly change the Kurdish calculations, it is clear that Jerusalem will be fully in favor of such an independent state. In June 2014, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pronounced his support for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq, stating that “they deserve it.”³⁶ That same month, then-President Shimon Peres met President Barack Obama and also spoke in favor of a Kurdish state in light of the situation in Iraq.³⁷ While some of the reports on the Israeli purchase of oil from the Kurdistan Region have been exaggerated, Israeli companies did facilitate the export of oil from the region and were not afraid to bypass Baghdad, since Israel doesn’t have diplomatic relations with Iraq.³⁸ In January 2016, Israeli Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked also voiced her positive sentiments towards the Kurds, and

stated, “It is time to help them” and the “Kurdish people are a partner for the Israeli people.”³⁹

The rise of the Islamic State and the struggle for its defeat have created a situation in which the Kurds have gained growing international attention and wider acknowledgment of their achievements and rights, thereby creating an overall positive feeling toward possible Kurdish independence.

Thus it appears that the rise of the Islamic State and the struggle for its defeat have created a situation in which the Kurds have gained growing international attention and wider acknowledgment of their achievements and rights, thereby creating an overall positive feeling (at least in public opinion in Western states) toward possible Kurdish independence. Moreover, as time passes and with the election of President Donald Trump, who does not see himself committed to continue the policy of its predecessors, American insistence on keeping Iraq as a unified state will perhaps diminish. Turkey’s alliance with Barzani has been sustained for quite a while, and Turkey’s growing troubles in the Middle East seem to imply that it will not endanger this alliance as long

as it continues to view it as bearing fruit both in the energy realm and in its struggle against the PKK.

Conclusion

As with many new states, it seems that the Kurdistan Region will not obtain the blessing of some of the actors in the region if it declares independence, and its birth as a state may be accompanied by war. Hence, courageous and strong leadership is an imperative for the Kurdistan Region. A new state in the making also requires a minimum of international legitimacy to become independent and, as Anaid argues, what is surprising nowadays is the lack of a strong reaction to announcements regarding possible Kurdish independence and the sense that “both the region and the world are becoming gradually more receptive to an independent Kurdistan.”⁴⁰

The political divide is a lingering problem in the Kurdistan Region, and of all the issues discussed in this article, it is probably the most difficult to solve. While the initial euphoria following independence might somewhat mitigate the intensity of this challenge in the first few months, it will likely resurface again early on. The issue of unifying the Peshmerga forces has been on the Iraqi Kurds’ agenda for almost three decades, and clearly some major steps have been taken in this respect, albeit not enough. Acquiring a state status would probably serve as a catalyst for advancing this aim further. Some of the economic problems the KRG is now encountering will accompany it if it achieves independence (for example, the inflated number of employees in the public sector and the economic price of absorbing the IDPs and refugees in the region). However, some of the economic difficulties will be more easily handled once the Kurdish Region gains independence and is able to issue its own currency, control the exchange rate, and obtain the necessary loans for building the state. Foreign support for independence will likely be rather muted. It is not expected that either Turkey or the US will give the KRG a green light, but it will be an achievement if these actors don’t present Barzani with a red light. Iran will presumably continue to be a staunch opponent of Kurdish independence, but while the possibility that it would attack this new entity exists, it is more likely to try and further strengthen its relations with the PUK and act in a subversive manner from within the new state. An independent Kurdish state will thus have many problems to deal with and will be highly dependent on Turkey and the US to deter Iran. Given all this, however, the balance sheet seems to tilt cautiously in favor of independence.

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The Trump Administration, the Middle East, and the Kurds

Zachary Pereira

The Trump Administration and the Middle East

Donald Trump's foreign policy toward the Kurds has not been outlined explicitly, notwithstanding various remarks about the Kurds and certain policy positions that will affect this ethnic group. Trump has made statements that favor the Kurds, including a comment on July 15, 2016 that he is a "big fan of the Kurds." He has also stated that "it would be ideal if we could get them [Turkey and the Kurds] together."¹ However, these favorable statements about the Kurds are joined by statements that might well worry the Kurds, including expressions of nostalgia for Saddam Hussein and trivialization of the mass murder of Kurds in 1989 by stating that Saddam threw around a "little gas."²

Along with this rhetoric, Trump has shown he is committed to policies that will have a direct impact on the Kurds, particularly the elimination of the Islamic State and the containment of Iran. The goal to eliminate the Islamic State is a policy carried over from the Obama administration, but with Trump's preference for the use of force. Trump has argued that the United States should "bomb the hell" out of the Islamic State,³ and that the only solution to the problem is a military solution. This unilateral approach has also included support for a no-fly zone over northern Syria at times,⁴ as well as threats to bomb Islamic State-controlled oil fields in order to deprive them of revenue⁵ and even proposals to send in ground forces.⁶ This contrasts with Obama's policies, which largely tried to prevent United States entanglement in the Syrian conflict. Obama did authorize limited military intervention in Syria; Trump's proposal would require a significant escalation in US intervention in that war-torn state. Trump's

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unilateral and more militarized approach to the Islamic State challenge could potentially favor the Kurds, as he may seek out local allies in Iraq and Syria to alleviate or lessen the need for US troops there.

Trump's approach to Iran, like his approach toward the Islamic State, is unilateral and militaristic. When asked about Iranian gunboats harassing US military ships, for example, he said that he would shoot them out of the water.⁷ In addition, in February 2017, in response to Iran's testing of ballistic missiles, the administration imposed new sanctions against the Iranian government.⁸ Trump's former National Security Advisor, retired General Michael Flynn, said at the time that Iran was being put on notice.⁹ In addition, both Secretary of Defense General James Mattis¹⁰ and presidential advisor Sebastian Gorka¹¹ have indicated that they perceive Iran as a threat. Thus while President Trump has only vaguely mentioned the Kurds, his pursuit of both the elimination of the Islamic State and the containment of Iran will involve the Kurds and have implications for them.

Kurdish Interests

Syrian and Iraqi Kurds are divided, and different Kurdish actors have different interests. Currently the three most prominent Kurdish actors are the PKK, which has proxies in Syria in the form of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which effectively controls Syrian Kurdistan and operates in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan, and the KDP and PUK, both of which are active in Iraqi Kurdistan and have proxies in Syria but wield little influence beyond Iraqi Kurdistan.

Syrian Kurdistan

Syrian Kurdistan is controlled by the PYD, which is an offshoot of the PKK. The PKK is a Kurdish nationalist organization that was founded in Turkey in the 1970s as a Marxist-Leninist organization that sought an independent Kurdistan.¹² The PKK has since abandoned its Marxist-Leninist ideology and desire for an independent Kurdistan and now wants autonomy for the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, and Syria.¹³ To this end, with the development of the Syrian civil war, the Syrian Kurds have been able to create their own autonomous region within Syria. This autonomous region was formed from three cantons, Afrin, Kobani, and Jazira, which are not contiguous but together form what is called Western Kurdistan or Rojava.¹⁴ Rojava is in practice an autonomous region within Syria, though it is very different from the autonomous region within Iraq.

While Syrian Kurdistan has managed to obtain a large degree of autonomy, like that of Iraqi Kurdistan, there are some substantial differences. Iraqi Kurdistan has enjoyed de facto autonomy since 1991 – when the US enforced a no-fly zone over northern Iraq – and de jure autonomy since 2003. Rojava did not obtain its autonomy until 2013, and even then, it was created out of a civil war and is not recognized by the Syrian government. This lack of recognition means that the autonomy that the Kurds now have in Syria reflects only the effective control by the PYD in the context of an ongoing civil war. Should the PYD be defeated, Rojava’s autonomy may cease.

In addition to the difference in legal status, the two Kurdistans have different systems of governance. Iraqi Kurdistan is more nationalistic, traditional, and tribal; Syrian Kurdistan is trying to create an alternative based on decentralization of power to the local level, to create “democracy without the state.”¹⁵ This model has seen, and seeks to create, hundreds if not thousands of municipalities that would be governed by the Rojava constitution. This model also does not endorse Kurdish nationalism and is meant to be inclusive of non-Kurds.¹⁶ While Rojava is currently controlled by the PYD, there is domestic opposition, most prominently from the KNC, which is an umbrella organization established by the KDP. Yet although the KNC operates in Syria, it is relatively marginal and has limited influence within Syrian Kurdistan. In addition to having a small following, its followers have been harassed by the PYD, as the two have opposing relationships with the Turkish government. The KNC, because of its relationship with the KDP and the KDP’s good relationship with the Turkish government, is strongly opposed by the PYD, as the latter is aligned with the PKK, which is currently in conflict with the Turkish government.¹⁷

The interest of the PYD within Syria is to maintain its autonomy, but at times has found it hard to do so. The PYD attempted to link Afrin to Kobani and Jazira in August of 2016, when a coalition of different militias, including the PYD, tried to take Jarablus and Manjib.¹⁸ This goal was thwarted when Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield in order to prevent the formation of a contiguous Syrian Kurdistan controlled by the PYD and to contain the growth of Rojava.¹⁹ Following this failure to link the cantons, the PYD has revised its interests and focused on consolidating territory already under its control.²⁰ The PYD has also stated that its forces will not participate in the liberation of Raqqa from the Islamic State. They will surround the city and contain the organization but will not be involved in the fighting inside the city, which will be left to Arab forces.²¹

While the PYD has failed to link the three cantons, it has created security arrangements with different political actors within Syria. The PYD's relations with the Assad regime as well as with the Syrian rebels have ranged from friendly to hostile, depending on the motivations of both the PYD and the other political actors. At times the PYD has fought with the Assad regime when fighting against other rebels and the Islamic State.²² However, at times the PYD has cooperated with other rebel groups against the Islamic State.²³ Furthermore, Assad has said he does not recognize Rojava as autonomous and has no intention of recognizing it.²⁴ This would imply that any cooperation with the regime is for short term, tactical reasons, and that once the Islamic State and the Syrian rebels have been defeated, Assad and the PYD could clash over Rojava's autonomy.

Iraqi Kurdistan

While the PKK and its proxies largely control Rojava in Syria, they are less active in most of Iraqi Kurdistan, where the primary political actors are the KDP, the Gorran Party, and the PUK. At the same time, the PKK has some influence in both the Mount Sinjar area and the Qandil Mountain area, though this presence is strongly opposed by the KDP²⁵ and has even resulted in armed clashes between both actors.²⁶ The opposition from the KDP lay in the concern that should the PKK gain influence in Iraqi Kurdistan, it may be at the expense of KDP influence.

Currently Iraqi Kurdistan is formally composed of four governorates: Erbil, Dohuk, Halabja, and Sulimaniyah. However, with the collapse of the Iraqi state and the rise of the Islamic State, the territories that the Kurds govern has expanded, as they have incorporated the governorate of Kirkuk as well as some territory in the north of Iraq.²⁷

The KDP was founded in 1946 by Mustafa Barzani and its base is in Erbil and Dohuk; the PUK was founded in 1975 by Jalal Talabani and its base is in Sulimaniyah.²⁸ Historically, both these parties have governed Iraqi Kurdistan together, although there has been tension and even conflict between them. The Kurdish civil war (1994-1997) was a particularly bloody episode in Iraqi Kurdistan's history and ended with a peace deal negotiated by America, which had Iraqi Kurdistan formally split into two. One area consisted of Erbil and Dohuk and was governed by the KDP; the second area consisted of Sulimaniyah and was governed by the PUK. While formally abolished in 2003, this division has informally continued to today with the fight against the Islamic State.

Since the formal establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 2003, the PUK and the KDP have controlled the Parliament, the primary formal political institution within Iraqi Kurdistan. In 2013, a new party, the Gorran Party, was formed, created by former members of the PUK who left the party because they were dissatisfied with its political corruption.²⁹ The results of the 2013 parliamentary election saw the KDP winning 38 seats, the Gorran Party winning 24 seats, and the PUK winning 18 seats. The President of Iraqi Kurdistan is Masoud Barzani of the KDP, and the Prime Minister, also from the KDP, is Nechirvan Barzani.³⁰

While the KDP currently has the greatest number of seats in the Parliament and control of the political executive, Iraqi Kurdistan is very divided. In August of 2015, President Barzani decided to extend his presidency beyond the constitutional two term limit. A month later, he removed four Gorran ministers, replaced them with ministers from the KDP, and then blocked Yousif Mohammed, the speaker of the Parliament and a Gorran MP, from entering Erbil.³¹ Both decisions effectively eliminated any democratic legitimacy that the KDP and President Barzani had enjoyed and concentrated political power in the hands of the KDP. These decisions have also polarized Iraqi Kurdistan, with the KDP and its supporters in one camp and the opposition in the other.

Political disorder is problematic because it spills over into both the foreign relations of the Iraqi Kurds and the military, as both the KDP and PUK have their own militias. The spillover affects the fight against the Islamic State, because rather than deploying their best forces and weapons against the organization, they are sometimes held in reserve and used for partisan purposes. Furthermore, because of the politicization of the military, the different Peshmerga units do not communicate with each other.³²

While there is division within the Kurdish military ranks, the Kurds have fought the Islamic State because it threatens the territories and the vital interests of both the KDP. The KDP has fought the Islamic State when it threatened Erbil and is currently fighting the Islamic State in northern Iraq, while the PUK has fought against the Islamic State in Kirkuk and recaptured Kirkuk. Erbil is a base and a vital interest of the KDP, and Kirkuk is a vital interest of the PUK because it is a stronghold³³ and because of its symbolic importance.

However, there are limitations as to how far both actors are willing to advance, and they have shown restraint when dealing with areas beyond their own territory. One key example of this limitation is the battle of Mosul:

as a senior KDP Peshmerga commander indicated, they are very reluctant to go into Mosul itself as they are worried about possible resistance.³⁴ Accordingly, if President Trump seeks to use the Kurds instead of Americans as frontline soldiers, he may find that while the Kurds will be willing to contain the Islamic State, they may not be willing to go into Islamic State-held territory. This division also spills over into the Iraqi Kurds' foreign policy. The KDP and the PUK lean toward different foreign regional powers; the former has strong ties with Turkey while the latter is inclined toward Iran.

Regional Powers and the Kurds

Further complicating the internal political dynamics in Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan is the role of regional powers. Turkey has very strong ties with the KDP in Iraq and more moderate ties with the PUK, while its relationship with the PKK and PYD in Syria is openly hostile. By contrast, Iran has very strong ties to the PUK and moderate ties to the KDP in Iraq and the PKK/PYD in Syria, explained by its broader regional aspirations. Key PKK territory exists along a route Iran uses to send materiel and personnel from Tehran to Latakia, both as a method for supporting the Assad regime and as an instrument to open a corridor to the Mediterranean. This route passes through the territories of Sinjar, Qamishli, and Kobani, all of which are currently controlled by either the PKK or its proxy, the PYD. Therefore, Iran must maintain good relations with the PKK for this route to function, and this route is essential for Iran to obtain the regional hegemony that it seeks.³⁵ While Iran has an interest in maintaining good relations with the PKK, it is concerned about the possibility that autonomy within Syria for the Kurds could possibility spill over.³⁶ This concern is linked to the PKK, because the PKK has a branch in Iran, called the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK).³⁷ PJAK and the Iranian government engaged in military clashes in 2011, but subsequently signed a ceasefire.³⁸

While Iran and Turkey have contrasting ties with the PYD, both are concerned about the spillover effect an autonomous Syrian Kurdistan would have on their respective Kurdish populations. Another source of commonality is their relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq; neither the Iranian nor the Turkish government wishes to see the current KDP government removed from power, though for different reasons. Turkey supports a KDP-controlled KRG because of its desire to turn itself into a regional energy hub and to lessen its dependency on Iranian and Russian energy.³⁹ To do this, it needs Iraqi Kurdistan's energy

to flow through Turkey,⁴⁰ and thus Erdogan has cultivated strong ties with the KDP and with President Barzani.⁴¹ However, it has not totally alienated the PUK; the leaders of both parties have been given Turkish passports and both parties have posted formal representatives in Turkey.

Iran's approach has been virtually the opposite. It has much stronger relations with the PUK, which it supported during the bloody Iraqi Kurdistan Civil War from 1994-1997, and Iranian forces have fought recently with the PUK against the Islamic State. Still, Iran did not oppose the extension of President Barzani's term and assisted the KDP when Erbil was attacked by the Islamic State, providing arms and personnel.⁴² Iran may be willing to support the KDP because Iranian interests are served by having a strong unified Iraqi Kurdistan fighting the Islamic State rather than having an Iraqi Kurdistan split, with the major factions fighting one another.

Going Forward

The internal political dynamics of both Kurdistans as well as regional political dynamics within the Middle East are central to any understanding of future United States-Kurdish relations. Regardless of which elements are aligned with the Kurds, there will be consequences that American policymakers will have to take in account.

All of the major Kurdish political actors share President Trump's primary objective of eliminating the Islamic State. But should America continue to arm the PYD or increase its support for the PYD, both the KDP and Turkey will likely object, since they will perceive this support as threatening their interests, and the fact that the US refrains from criticizing the Turkish government's actions to suppress the PKK within Turkish borders would make little difference. America could, however, try to preempt Turkish opposition and cultivate more Turkish goodwill by extraditing Gülen or curtailing his influence. The US could also balance any military and financial assistance to the PYD by providing equal assistance to the KDP in Iraq. While arming the KDP might appease any concern the KDP has about arming the PYD, one problem that could arise is that these arms could potentially be used not against the Islamic State, but rather against the PUK should a civil war erupt within Iraqi Kurdistan. The internal tension between the KDP and the PUK could potentially be contained if the United States applies pressure on both political actors – the United States negotiated the peace agreement between both actors in 1997 – and this could reduce the chances of a civil war within Kurdistan and focus Kurdish attention on the Islamic

State. Still, the underlying conflict between the KDP and the PYD can only be truly resolved by political reform in both Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan and by a reduction in tensions between Turkey and the PYD.

Another problem that will arise should Trump seek to use the Kurds to fight the Islamic State is that the KDP, PUK, and PYD are all reluctant to operate beyond the borders of what they consider to be Kurdish territory. Therefore, while the Kurds will be useful in containing the Islamic State, it is questionable whether they will assist in its elimination beyond those borders.

In the pursuit of Trump's second objective of containing Iran, the Kurds are unlikely to support this objective given the relationships that exist between the primary Kurdish political actors in Iraq and Syria and the Iranian government. Iran has assisted both the KDP and the PUK in their fight against the Islamic State. Furthermore, Iran has not and is not threatening the political interest of either actor. The same is true of the relationship between the PKK/PYD and Iran. This does not mean there will not be tensions, since the parties have different interests in Syria, but it does mean that neither side is currently pursuing its interests at the expense of the other. Looming over the future, however, is the major issue of Rojava's future as an autonomous entity.

Conclusion

United States policy toward the Middle East is shifting with Donald Trump in the White House. This change will likely consist of America taking a much more aggressive stance toward the Islamic State and pursuing a policy of containment of Iran. Both these policies have implications for US-Kurdish relations. This article has examined the different variables and factors that must be taken into consideration before any policy can be formed relating to the Kurds. While President Trump may want to arm the Kurds to fight the Islamic State, there are reasons why such a policy would not be advised. First, while the Kurds will fight the Islamic State when it directly threatens Kurdish territory, they are much more cautious about fighting beyond Kurdish territory and interests. Second, while Kurdish political actors perceive the Islamic State as a threat to their interests, they also perceive each other as threats and therefore any arms given to the Kurds to fight the Islamic State could potentially be used against rival Kurdish factions. The Kurds are likely to resist embracing the pursuit of President Trump's second goal of containing Iran, because none of the major Kurdish

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Bill for Recognition of the Arab Minority as a National Minority

Doron Matza and Muhammed Abu Nasra

Proposed Basic Law for Recognition of the Arab Minority as a National Minority

In early November 2016, MK Jamal Zahalka (Joint List) submitted a bill for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority. All the other members of his party joined him in sponsoring the bill. The bill states that recognition of the rights of the national minority means recognizing its right to manage its cultural affairs independently, ensuring appropriate representation of the Arab minority in state institutions, recognizing the Arabs' right to establish representative political institutions, granting the right of the minority to participate actively in making decisions that affect it, and ensuring that state institutions will take no significant decision with consequences for the Arab population without its participation. The bill also states that the state shall take measures through the education system to foster the history, heritage, and culture of the Arab minority. The proposed basic law includes a "restrictive clause" stating that no laws shall be enacted contravening the basic law except for a worthy purpose, and that any such laws must be consistent with the values of Israel as a democratic country. The bill also includes a "stability clause" stating that emergency regulations cannot alter the wording of the bill, repeal it, or establish conditions for it.

The bill was sent for a preliminary reading in the Knesset plenum, and – as expected – was rejected, with 77 opposed versus 19 in favor. During

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the debate Minister of Justice MK Ayelet Shaked stated, “Israel is the only country of the Jewish people. The Arab nation has rights in other countries.”

This is not the first time that Arab MKs tried to promote a bill of this sort. Identical bills were proposed by Arab MKs since 2001. There were actually five completely identical initiatives (May 2001, July 2003, October 2009, July 2013, and June 2015), yet in contrast to the current proposal, the previous bills never reached the stage of a preliminary reading in the Knesset plenum. In the spirit of the bill for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority, Arab MKs submitted a bill in July 2016 on amending the State Education Law in Israel, namely, adding a clause to the existing law dealing with the “goals of Arab education.” In this framework, the bill insists on the need to enhance the status of the Arabic language and reinforce the Arab-Palestinian identity in the education system for the purpose of strengthening the Palestinian national identity, memory, and narrative of the Arab students.

While the various proposed bills for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority were worded identically, the differences lay in their sponsors. The two most recent proposals, from June and November 2016, were sponsored by all the MKs in the Joint List, while previous proposals (May 2001 and July 2003) were sponsored by MKs from Balad, including its Party head Azmi Bishara. The dominant voice in the Joint List is that of Hadash, which since the 1970s has generally advocated a moderate position on relations with the state, refraining from demands of a significantly national character. This contrasted with the Balad Party, whose founding in the 1990s reflected opposition to the older political leadership and the pragmatic civil line it represented for many years. The stance of the Joint List under the leadership of Ayman Odeh, a member of the Hadash Party, in favor of the proposed bill, with its unmistakable nationalistic line, reflects a new development that sheds light on the background and motives behind the measure taken by the Arab MKs.

Background to the Bill

Analysis of the bill’s background and the motives behind it considers two time dimensions: the long term, which takes into account the fundamental processes underway in the Arab minority in Israel in recent decades, and the short term, involving the changes in relations between Jews and Arabs in recent years. These two dimensions in effect represent two ostensibly contradictory interpretations of what the Arab parliamentarians are doing.

The long term perspective indicates a process of constructing the collective national identity of the Arab minority in Israel, and therefore regards the proposal as a measure incorporating Arab activism and willingness to challenge the establishment and the Jewish majority society. The current context of Jewish-Arab relations, on the other hand, indicates that the proposal reflects deep despair on the part of the Arab leadership regarding developments in relations between the Israeli establishment and the Arab minority, and the bill thus implies defense, helplessness, and signals as to the possible consequences of government policy. In fact, however, these two perspectives complement each other more than they contradict one another.

The Long Term

The bills submitted by the Arab parliamentarians since 2001 reflect the historic process of creating the identity of the Arab minority as a collective minority with a national Palestinian Arab identity. This process has acquired a dialectical dimension over the years, in which the affiliation of Israel's Arabs with the state became deeper in the political and civil aspect, but at the same time, the collective Palestinian identity of the Arab minority in Israel grew, based on the Palestinian national heritage shared by the Palestinian population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and including a particular local dimension separate from the general Palestinian narrative. The balance between these two elements, the political and civil aspect and the national cultural aspect, incurred tensions that were exacerbated in the general context of the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, and due to the unique situation of the Arabs in Israel as a population poised between two spheres – the Israeli and the Arab-Palestinian – engaged in an ongoing conflict.

The construction of the complex identity of the Arabs in Israel is an ongoing process marked by prominent milestones. The 1970s saw a rise in Palestinian identity.¹ This process was accompanied by both increasing readiness for political activism with respect to the state and a profound feeling of alienation, as expressed in growing support among the Arab population for the national struggle of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and willingness to take to the streets in protest. With the deepening of national identity, there were heightened political demands for civil equality, which to a great extent became the political banner of the Hadash party. During the 1980s, the process of strengthening the Palestinian

national identity of the Arabs in Israel was consolidated, in part under the influence of the first intifada (1987-1991), which shaped their political activities but generated a lack of tolerance from the Jewish majority in Israel. In the 1990s, following the Oslo Accords, more direct contact between the Arab political elite in Israel and the political elite on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip (the leadership of the Palestinian Authority) became possible, as well as ties with the Palestinian public in general.²

Palestinian national awareness, which became stronger in the 1990s, incorporated, inter alia, the return of the concept of *nakba* to public discourse, as reflected in the organization of assemblies, parades, exhibitions, and seminars, and the publication of dozens of articles in the Palestinian and Arab press dealing with its significance in Palestinian national life.³ The growing feeling of Palestinian identity among Arabs in Israel peaked in the first decade of the 21st century, in light of the second intifada⁴ and the events of October 2000, in which Arab demonstrators in the Galilee and the Triangle clashed with security and police forces.

Another consistent feature of the process of constructing the national identity of the Arab minority in Israel is the greater demands made of the state. Jeene's "ethnic bargaining" model,⁵ which focuses on methods of bargaining by minority groups with the state and potential modes of action, sheds light on the process that the Arab minority has undergone in formulating its demands. The model lists the range of possible minority demands vis-à-vis a majority on a continuum, in which the initial reference point is a civil-political demand for reverse discrimination on the basis of the idea of material equality. From there, the model develops directly into demands with a significant national dimension for political equality. This begins with a demand for cultural autonomy, proceeds to a demand for independent political-territorial management, and continues ultimately to a "secession strategy." The decision by the minority about what strategy to employ depends on many variables, including the establishment policy.

Thus a long term analysis suggests that the Arab minority's demands of the state range from demands focusing on material equality and elimination of social gaps with the Jewish public (mainly in the 1970s) to demands with a significant collective national dimension. These demands included calls for making Israel a bi-national state or a state of all its citizens. They received substantial political expression in the 1990s, for example with the founding of what in the perspective of Jewish politics were activist political movements such as Balad. These movements dared to voice demands with

an explicitly national dimension, and made a substantial contribution to encouragement of the national discourse within Arab politics and Arab popular opinion.

This does not mean that the demands for civil equality have faded or vanished from the political game, but they were raised simultaneously with national demands constituting a profound paradigm shift. Making Israel a “country of all its citizens,” for example, was explained as being the ultimate solution for civil inequality, because the source of civil inequality is political inequality. The peak in the minority formulating its collective national demands was the publication of the Arab national vision documents in 2006-2007. These presented an explicit Arab demand for a paradigm shift in Israel, from the 1948 paradigm – i.e., a democratic Jewish state – to a “democratic order” paradigm, meaning in the effect the introduction of a bi-national state and the granting of collective national rights to the Arab minority in a number of areas, including the political sphere – i.e., the founding of independent political institutions of the Arab minority, together with autonomous management in culture and society.

From this perspective, proposing bills for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority reflects the historic process of the development of the national identity of the Arab minority, and what follows it amounts to a process of making greater national demands. The significance lies in a forceful demand for a change in priorities in the country with respect to the minority that amounts to a change of Israel’s constitutional foundations, full and equal inclusion of Arabs in the state’s decision making process,⁶ and the granting of political and legal equality, together with instrumental equality.⁷

One reflection of this lies in the proposals themselves, which state that the Arab minority in Israel is a national minority entitled not only to full rights as individuals, but also to collective rights. The bills include the demand to allow the Arab minority to manage its cultural affairs (cultural autonomy), to be included on an equal basis in all state institutions, and to establish and consolidate representative institutions in every sphere in which Arabs are distinctive as a national minority. It is also proposed that Arabic be made a second official language, and that Israel recognize the special affinity of the Arab minority with the Palestinian people and other Arab peoples, and allow the Arab citizens to express their Arab identity.⁸

The explanation of the proposed bill states: “Israeli law does not recognize collective rights for Arab citizens of Israel, but only on the basis of religious

adherence. The authorities in Israel talk officially about minorities or a non-Jewish population, not about an Arab national minority...The goal of this bill is to recognize the Arab minority in Israel as an Arab national minority entitled to collective rights, and to base those rights on fully equal civil rights of the Arab citizens as individuals. Recognition of the rights of the minority nationality as a collective also means recognition of its right to manage its cultural affairs.”⁹

The Current Dimension

At the same time, the bills cannot be separated from developments regarding the Arab minority’s relations with the Israeli establishment and the Jewish majority. Since the events of October 2000, relations between the Arab population and the state have deteriorated. The violent events and their aftermath had a profound effect on the quality of the relations, and the forming of the Or Commission, which attempted to investigate the roots of the events, did not temper the mutual hostility between Jews and Arabs. Another factor was the fact that the Lapid Committee, which was supposed to translate the principles recommended by the Or Commission into practical measures, diluted the spirit of the recommendations. Relatively little progress was made in the ensuing years toward achieving civil equality and narrowing gaps in various areas, such as education, budgets, local authorities, housing, and infrastructure in the Arab communities.

At the same time, in a broader aspect, not only did relations between the state and the Arab minority collapse, but hope too was lost. The expectations of peace and the achievement of a new Middle East gave way to the depressing situation of the second intifada, following the total failure of the efforts led by Prime Minister Ehud Barak to end the interim agreement and complete the negotiations on a permanent settlement. These events were accompanied by the weakening of the Palestinian Authority, the wave of terrorism that swept over Israel starting in the fall of 2000, and some retreat from the previous measures toward normalization between Israel and the Arab world. With the takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas and the ensuing military campaign by Israel against Hezbollah (2006), Israel entered a new era with completely different characteristics than those of the 1990s.

These events also had a material effect on Israeli society. The liberal civil discourse that characterized Israeli society during the period of the political negotiations, which emphasized making Israel a liberal pluralistic

society and making human and group rights a priority, was replaced by an ethnic-national discourse. In face of the collapse of the process of achieving a settlement, and what was perceived as the growing willingness of many players in the external system (Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas) to challenge the very legitimacy of Israel and its basic ideological foundations, Israeli society moved to fortify the status and security of the Jewish collective. In a similar spirit, the events of October 2000 were regarded by the Jewish public as an internal civil rebellion on the part of the Arab political leadership and elements in the population. It was only a short step from there to punitive measures against the Arab sector following the events, consisting of Jews refraining from entering Arab communities for commercial and economic ties. Six years after the events, the Jewish political system took a similar attitude toward the Arab vision documents, regarding them as an expression of an effort by the Arab intellectual leadership to undermine the foundations of Israel as a democratic Jewish state. The severe responses by all parts of the Jewish political spectrum against the texts, and especially against their authors, can be interpreted in the light of this background.

The process underway in Israeli society over the past 15 years is also reflected in the attitude toward Arab society in Israel. At the popular level, an explicit expression of this was reinforcement of racist trends among groups in Jewish society. Opinion surveys indicated dissatisfaction in Jewish society at living in the presence of Arab society, as reflected, for example, in the perception of Arabs as “enemies,” but also in the unwillingness shown by the various surveys to live next to Arabs and conduct reciprocal social ties with them.¹⁰ Anti-Arab trends were clear in national politics, as highlighted in recent years in a series of legislative processes aimed at restricting the presence of the Arab minority in the Israeli political and cultural arena, for example the proposed Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, which was designed to formally anchor Israel’s status as the country of the Jewish nation. To this was added the effort to reduce Arab representation in the Knesset by increasing the minimum percentage that a party must receive in an election in order to obtain representation in the Knesset; the campaign against political parties stretching the limits of Jewish democracy, such as Balad and the northern branch of the Islamic movement in Israel, which was classified as an illegal organization; and the anti-Arab discourse, some of which was encouraged by ruling political groups, for example following the December 2016 wave of fires in the country, in which Arab citizens were falsely accused of nationally motivated arson.

The last 15 years have seen alienation between Jewish and Arab society and a worsening in the attitude of the Jewish politics and popular opinion toward the Arab minority. This trend finds Arab society and politics more anxious about the future of its relations with the Jewish majority society. Arab political groups are expressing growing concern about what they describe as the oppressiveness of the Jewish majority and continual erosion in the ability of the Arab minority to defend its rights as a national minority, given the trend toward political exclusion and an ostensible increasing attempt to exclude it from the political sphere and further limit its ability to influence the state agenda. This feeling is especially prominent among the Arab MKs from the Joint List, because the emerging trend toward exclusion on the part of the Jewish establishment casts doubt on the ability to exert political influence and the efforts made in the past 18 months to leverage the List's achievements in the elections for the purpose of making progress toward the sector's goals in the social and civil sphere. This has implications that affect the status of the List in Arab public opinion, as already reflected in the some of the opinion surveys showing limited support for Ayman Odeh, and the inclination of the Arab public to stay away from the polls in national elections.

It appears that the bills for recognition of the Arab minority are designed less to challenge the Jewish majority, and more to protect the Arab minority against what is perceived as that majority's use of its political power to harm the minority's rights.

In this respect, the bills since 2001 for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority reflect the process of excluding the Arab minority from the political and cultural arena in Israel, and the downtrend in relations between Jews and Arabs. The feeling of concern among minority groups over the current trends accompanying Jewish-Arab relations since 2000, and in recent years to a greater extent, is translated into an almost desperate effort to anchor the minority's rights through the only type of action available to the minority, i.e., the parliamentary axis. It therefore appears that the bills for recognition of the Arab minority are designed less to challenge the Jewish majority, and more to protect the Arab minority against what is perceived as the oppression of the majority – i.e., that majority's use of its political

power to harm the minority's rights, and to attempt to place a type of barrier against the current process in which the Arab minority is losing its foothold within the Israeli political and cultural sphere, and is being pushed

relentlessly within itself. From this perspective, the measures should also be regarded as a type of signal to the state authorities that excluding the minority from the political sphere in Israel is liable to lead that minority toward nationalist separatism.

An explicit expression appeared in the remarks by Zahalka during the debate on the preliminary reading of the bill, in which he said, "Everything in this bill is found in international law. It is based on a modern concept of human rights that includes, in addition to civil rights, the right of belonging. It should not be restricted, nor should the ruling power be used to attempt to change it. The goal is defense of the Arab minority against the ruthlessness of the majority."¹¹ It is not just Zahalka's remarks that support the idea that the bill is defensive in nature, however; an analysis of the political-parliamentary context leads to the same conclusion. Zahalka's bill in the name of the Joint List follows a Knesset bill popularly referred to as the Muezzin bill, which forbids muezzins in mosques to call worshippers to prayers using amplification from 11:00 PM until 7:00 AM because of the environmental noise. The bill sponsored by MK Ahmed Tibi for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority, which was proposed in 2014, followed efforts by members of the Jewish Home Party to push through a Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, thereby incorporating the responsive principle in the bill proposed by the Arab MKs to what Tibi called, "an attempt to harm Arab minority citizens."¹²

Significance and Recommendations

The latest proposal of the bill for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority reflects two processes. On the one hand, it reflects a long term process of the formation of the national identity of the Arab minority as a collective minority. In this framework, the minority has adopted assertive measures, which reflects the development of identity taking place in that minority. On the other hand, it also echoes the process characterizing the worsening attitude and alienation between the state and the Arab population over the past 15 years. In this framework, the minority leadership, out of a deep sense of anxiety and political persecution, seeks to adopt constitutional measures aimed at defending its basic rights, and at the same time signal to the ruling groups that excluding the minority is liable to exact a political cost in the form of a nationalistic separatist attitude.

These two processes are ostensibly contradictory. One embodies challenge and activism, while the second is passive and defensive. In

practice, they reflect the existing complexity in almost every aspect of the Arab minority's status in the country, as well as the difficulties involving the question of the complex identity from one level, the civil-Israeli level, to the second level, the Palestinian national level. Through this dichotomy, it is necessary to analyze the repeated proposal of the bills as encapsulating the development of the minority's national identity, while reformulating its demands from the state. These have grown from the demand for civil equality, as reflected in the demand for a narrowing of social and economic gaps, into demands for political equality, reflected in a demand for equal participation in shaping the state agenda, and for a real partnership in the public sphere.

The demand for recognition of the Arab community as a national minority, which from the perspective of Jewish politics reflects the separate national identity of the Arabs in Israel, has been made in the past decade by Arab politicians not only as an activist objective in challenging the existing order of Jewish hegemony, but from the opposite point of departure. There is genuine fear of total civil exclusion from the Israeli political and cultural arena resulting from the government's exclusion policy. As such, rather than designed to challenge the state and destroy its constitutional foundations, the demand for recognition of the Arab minority as a national minority is aimed at a more modest objective of anchoring the basic rights of the Arab minority and preventing their erosion. From this perspective, it appears that the Arab minority is forced by the growing effort on the part of the Israel establishment, backed by the Jewish public, to exclude the Arabs from the general Israeli political sphere, into presenting a national agenda in the form of a demand for recognition as a national minority.

This is a significant issue. From the Jewish lens, as expressed by the Minister of Justice, the bill proposed by the Arab MKs is perceived as

Excluding the minority from the political sphere in Israel is liable to lead that minority toward nationalist separatism.

opposition to the state, and aggravates hostility to the Arabs and encourages measures against them, like a political whirlwind in which it is difficult to distinguish between cause and effect. Even if Jewish politics are unable to accept the bills proposed by the Arab MK because they constitute a change in the constitutional foundations of Israel and the basic

principles of Israel as a Jewish state, the political establishment should regard the proposal of the Arab bills as a sign of the harsh atmosphere prevailing in Arab politics as a result of the government's policy, and as a

warning of the development of relations with the Arab minority, which is losing its foothold in the public arena and unwillingly pushed back into itself.

This development constitutes a threat to elements of social cohesion in Israel, and has the potential to develop into a situation of a state within a state, with characteristics of both social and national separatism. Furthermore, this trend runs counter to what has emerged in recent years as the strategy of the Arab political leadership, as represented by the Joint List, of connecting with the focus of social discourse in Israel, and even cooperating with the government in measures aimed at promoting socioeconomic equality between Jews and Arabs. From this perspective, these opposing trends in government policy are liable to return Arab politics to the political extremes of the foundations of the national discourse represented by factions like Balad, and to foundations of the Islamic discourse represented by the northern branch of the Islamic movement in Israel. The Israeli government should therefore reassess its overall policy toward the Arab minority, and together with the effort to narrow the civil gaps between Arabs and Jews and integrate the Arabs in the Israeli economy, should realize the problematic significance of the constitutional and other measures excluding the minority from the political and cultural arena in Israel, and restrain promotion of such matters.

Notes

- 1 M. Amara and S. Kabaha, *Divided Identity: Political Division and Social Reflections in a Divided Village* (Givat Haviva: Institute for Peace Studies, 1996); and R. Cohen, *Strangers in Their Own Home* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006).
- 2 N. Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
- 3 Esther Webman, *The Nakba: A Founding Myth in Palestinian National Identity*, in *From Intifada to War: Milestones in the Palestinian Experience*, ed. Tamar Yegnes (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, 2003), pp. 109-17.
- 4 R. Israeli, *Arabs in Israel: Friends or Foe?* (Shaarei Tikva, Ariel Center for Policy Research, 2002).
- 5 E. Jeene, "A Bargaining Theory of Minority Demands: Explaining the Dog that Did not Bite," *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 729-54.
- 6 Cohen, *Strangers in Their Own Home*.
- 7 Yitzhak Reiter, "Internal and External Factors in the Jewish-Arab Conflict in Israel," in *Jews and Arabs in Israel Facing a Changing Reality*, eds. Shlomo

- Hasson and Khaled Abu-Asaba (Jerusalem: Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, 2004), pp. 54-60.
- 8 Israel has no legislation defining the status of Hebrew and Arabic as official languages in the country. Their definition as official languages is anchored in Mandatory legislation. Nevertheless, the prevailing practice in Israel gives Hebrew senior status as being, for example, the language of legislation. The bill proposed by the Arab factions includes the demand for formal anchoring of the Arabic language as an official language in Israel.
 - 9 For the complete version of the bill, see Knesset website: [http://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Legislation/Laws/Pages/LawBill.aspx?t=lawsuggesti
onssearch&lawitemid=565337](http://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Legislation/Laws/Pages/LawBill.aspx?t=lawsuggesti
onssearch&lawitemid=565337).
 - 10 A 2017 opinion survey by the Institute for National Security Studies found that 25 percent of the Jewish public perceive Arabs as potential enemies, and 41 percent believe that Arabs should be respected, but also suspected (annual conference of the Institute for National Security Studies, January 23, 2017).
 - 11 Knesset announcement, rejected on the preliminary reading: Basic Law: Arab Minority as a National Minority, November 9, 2016, <http://main.knesset.gov.il/News/PressReleases/pages/press091116-9ms5.aspx>.
 - 12 Moran Azulay and Hassan Shaalan, "Muezzin Bill Passes Preliminary Reading," *Ynet*, March 8, 2017, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4932562,00.html>.

The Syrian Economy: Current State and Future Scenarios

Alon Rieger and Eran Yashiv

The Pre-Conflict Syrian Economy

The Syrian economy as a whole should be considered in terms of key macroeconomic indicators.¹ Even before the outbreak of the civil war, Syria had a very poor economy, and according to GDP per capita figures ranked 122 in the world in 2009 (at \$2,570). Concurrently its growth rate was relatively high: except for 1 percent in 2003, it ranged between 4 percent and 7 percent per annum. This high growth rate was most probably the outcome of the reform conducted in Syria in the early 2000s with the aid of the IMF. While the population grew at an average rate of 2.5 percent a year, the average labor force growth rate was slower and there was a decline in the labor force participation rate, from 49 percent in 2003 to 43 percent in 2009. The rate of unemployment declined from 11 percent in 2003 to 8 percent in 2009. The volume of external trade increased in the 2003-2008 period, with a slowdown in 2009 that can be attributed to the global crisis and did not have a big effect on the economy.

A few salient facts may be noted in terms of the economy's sectoral make-up:

- a. Agriculture's share in GDP was 17 percent, a large percentage relative to modern, advanced economies. This strengthens the notion that despite Syria's progress in the 2003-2010 period, it remained a very underdeveloped economy.
- b. The oil industry dominated the sectoral distribution of exports (almost half of total exports). The other main exports were goods, which require low skill levels.

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c. The share of Aleppo (which subsequently became the focal area of the conflict) in consumption, capital, number of industrial establishments, and so on was around 30 percent. The corresponding share of metropolitan Damascus was 40 percent.

Economic factors played a role in triggering the conflict. Although the reform earlier in the decade had a general positive effect on the Syrian economy, the gaps that it created between rural regions and metropolitan ones may well have had highly adverse effects. In addition, Syria's climate was very volatile, and water-related violence was on the rise. In the period 2006-2011, Syria experienced a multi-season, multi-year period of extreme drought that contributed to agricultural failures, economic dislocations, and population displacement.² Major developments included the following:

- a. Between 2006 and 2009, around 1.3 million inhabitants of eastern Syria were affected by agricultural failures.
- b. An estimated 800,000 people lost their livelihoods and basic food supports.
- c. A return of the drought in 2011 worsened the situation, and by late 2011, 2-3 million people were affected, with 1 million, according to UN estimates, driven into food insecurity.
- d. More than 1.5 million people, mostly agricultural workers and family farmers, moved from rural areas to cities and camped on the outskirts of Syria's major cities.³

The Devastation of the Syrian Economy since 2011

Level and Growth of Economic Activity

Table 1 and Figure 1 show GDP growth and its various components in the conflict period.

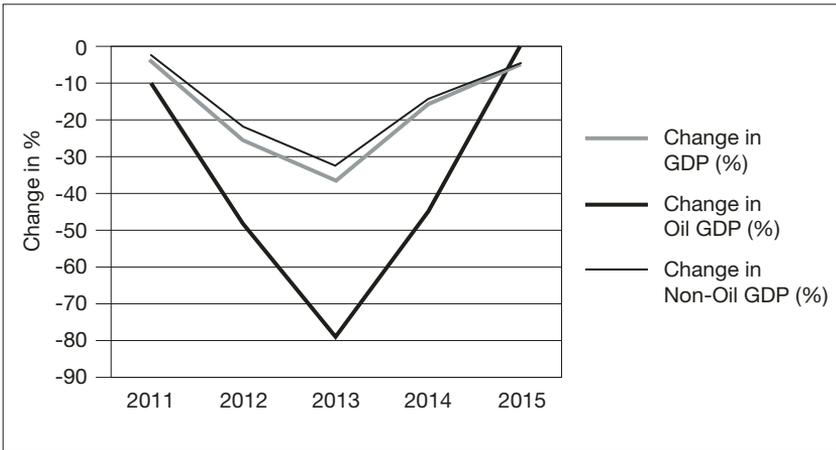
Table 1. Conflict Period Growth

Period	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Change in GDP (%)	3	-3	-25	-36	-15	-5
Change in oil GDP (%)		-10	-49	-79	-44	0
Change in non-oil GDP (%)		-2	-22	-32	-14	-5
Government revenue (% of GDP)	24	19	12	7	6	5
Oil-related revenue (% of GDP)	8	5	3	1	1	1
Non-oil tax revenue (% of GDP)	10	9	5	4	3	3
Non-oil non-tax revenue (% of GDP)	7	5	3	2	2	2

Table 1. Conflict Period Growth, cont'd

Period	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Government expenditure (% of GDP)	27	29	27	23	23	17
Current expenditure (% of GDP)	18	21	23	21	21	15
Investment expenditure (% of GDP)	9	7	4	3	3	2
Fiscal deficit (% of GDP)	-3	-9	-16	-16	-17	-12

Source: Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR) estimates

Figure 1. Conflict Period GDP Growth

Source: SCPR estimates

The 2015 level of GDP was 38 percent of 2010 GDP. Non-oil GDP was 42 percent of 2010 non-oil GDP, and oil GDP was only 5 percent of what it was in 2010.

Total GDP loss was estimated at \$163 billion by the end of 2015; capital stock loss was estimated at \$67 billion. Syrian Center for Policy Research estimates on the loss of capital as a result of the conflict indicate that as of the fourth quarter of 2015, the capital stock was 43 percent of what it was in 2010.⁴ Some estimates indicate that GDP contracted by another 19 percent in 2015 and by 8 percent in 2016.⁵

The Economic Decline in the Regional Context

Table 2 provides for a region-based analysis of the Syrian economy. Over the period of 2011-2014, GDP per capita in Syria plunged to an estimated

55 percent of GDP per capita in the Gaza Strip and 11 percent of GDP per capita in Lebanon.

Table 2. Regional Comparison of GDP per Capita (US dollars)

Country	GDP per capita 2010	GDP per capita 2011-2014, average
Syria ¹	2,700	975
Jordan ²	4,054	4,534
Egypt ²	2,668	3,168
Lebanon ²	8,764	8,510
West Bank ³	2,913	3,605
Gaza ³	1,487	1,730

Sources: (1) SCPR estimates (2) World Bank (3) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

Sectoral Changes

There has been a substantial change in the sectoral distribution of GDP. The sector subject to the largest amount of damage was the housing sector, which constituted an estimated 66 percent of the total value of damage.⁶ The mining sector has shrunk from 13 percent to 2 percent of GDP, a change attributed to the collapse of the oil industry. In the meantime, the agriculture sector has grown from 17 percent to 29 percent of GDP.⁷

Public consumption, which increased early in the conflict, subsequently declined dramatically to 45 percent of what it was in 2010.⁸ Private consumption reacted immediately to the conflict, and has been in decline since its very beginning, though at a lower rate than public consumption. It is now 45 percent of what it was in 2010.⁹

Import and export volumes shrank to very low levels, with the major collapse of exports occurring in the oil sector. As of 2010, oil exports were 49 percent of Syrian exports. Since 2012, Syria has become an oil importer.

The Labor Market and Poverty

The labor market suffered major losses. As of late 2015, the unemployment rate was 53 percent, with 2.6 million workers employed and 2.9 million unemployed. By way of comparison, in 2011, when the conflict was in its initial stages, 5.2 million people were employed, and the unemployment rate was 15 percent (before the conflict it was 8 percent).¹⁰ According to ESCWA estimates, as of 2015, 83 percent of the population was below the upper poverty line. For comparison, in 2010 only 28 percent of the

population was considered poor by this standard. It is estimated that 50 percent of the nation's disposable income is used for food consumption.¹¹

Monetary Variables

Syria has experienced very high inflation: the average annual rate between 2010 and 2015 was 35 percent. The CPI as of 2015 was 4.5 times its level in 2010 and 9 times its level in 2005.¹² In terms of foreign exchange, there are formal and informal markets. The formal rate was around 250 Syrian pounds for one US dollar at the end of 2015, while the black market price was around 350 Syrian pounds for one US dollar. The price before the conflict was 45 Syrian pounds for one US dollar.¹³

Key Future Scenarios

Scenario 1: Continuation of the Conflict

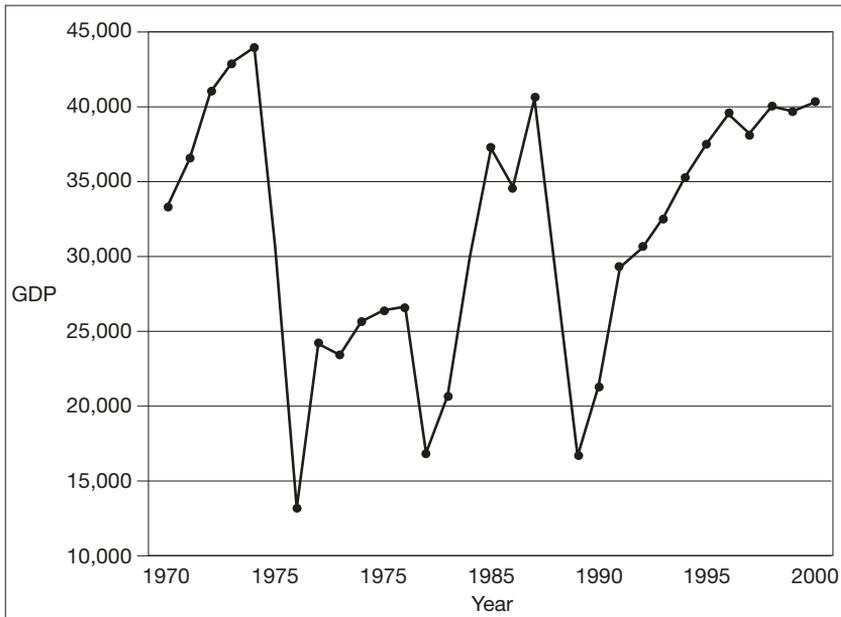
Continuation of the conflict means continuation of the economic destruction delineated above. If the conflict continues, it is highly likely that GDP will shrink further, and the question is at what rate. Current GDP is 38 percent of its 2010 level. The World Bank has projected that the 2016 decline would be 8 percent, which means 2016 GDP was 35 percent of the 2010 level. These estimates indicate that the rate of GDP contraction is decreasing.¹⁴ The unemployment rate reacted faster than other economic indicators, but has been almost unchanged over the past two years.

It can be conjectured, then, that a continuation of the conflict would inflict further damage to GDP, but at a diminishing rate. The fact that the rate of change has been substantially lower suggests that under certain circumstances the Syrian economy may even reach a new, low "steady state." However, it seems that Syria has not yet reached this level. Necessary conditions for an economy experiencing a civil war to reach a steady state are that the conflict does not expand to regions with high levels of economic activity, and does not destroy capital and/or cause a decline in the labor force. Such conditions do not currently exist in Syria, with Aleppo having been one of the major regions of battle. Therefore, as long as the war takes place on several fronts, including urban centers, further damages are to be expected. Moreover, because investment declined more heavily than other components of the economy, foreign aid is imperative to build up the necessary amount of capital for a steady state to exist.

Historically, there are examples of economies that witnessed positive or zero growth rates during civil wars. One relevant historical example of

an economy that went through a long period of civil war is the Lebanese economy. In the course of Lebanon's civil war between 1975 and 1990, there were changes in the intensity of conflict, in its main regions of battle, and in foreign intervention. Figure 2 shows the changes in GDP throughout that conflict.

Figure 2. Lebanon's Real GDP, 1970-2000



Source: Penn World Table¹⁵

Notes: Constant 2005 prices in US\$

Figure 2 shows a huge contraction of GDP in the first two years of the conflict. Thereafter, and until the 1982 Lebanon War, the economy grew at a relatively stable rate. In 1982 GDP collapsed again. The partial Israeli retreat in 1985 signaled a period of development, followed by another period of negative growth in the late 1980s. Following the end of the civil war in 1990, Lebanon experienced steady positive growth, but reached its level of pre-war GDP only 15 years later (or 20 years later, according to IMF estimates¹⁶).

This example shows the possibility that positive and even stable growth rates may be achieved in the course of a conflict, although such growth may be short-lived. In any case, it can take the economy a long time to reach its

pre-conflict level. One must keep in mind that even if Syria enters a “steady state,” its current state is almost unprecedentedly bad. The level of poverty exceeds 80 percent, GDP has contracted by more than 60 percentage points, and 45 percent of the population comprises IDPs and refugees.

Scenario 2: A Single State/Economy

A single state is probably the best scenario for the recovery of the Syrian economy. Putting aside the question of whether it would be Alawite, Sunni, or an Alawite-Sunni federation, any of these three options would presumably lead to a reconstruction of the Syrian economy.

To understand the scale of reconstruction, recall that in late 2015 the total economic loss was estimated at \$255 billion.¹⁷ This loss equals five times the 2010 GDP or thirteen times current GDP. Again, the decline in GDP itself is estimated at \$163 billion, which equals three times the 2010 GDP or eight times current GDP.¹⁸

The loss of capital is estimated at \$67 billion (1.3 times 2010 GDP). A 2016 IMF report estimates the reconstruction costs of physical infrastructure in the range of \$100-200 billion.¹⁹ The damage to the labor force is due to emigration (refugees and migrants), internal displacement, and war-related deaths and injuries. While the capital stock is now 44 percent of its level in 2011, the labor force is 90 percent of what it was in 2011. However, with an unemployment rate of 53 percent, the number of employed workers is 50 percent of the 2011 number. Overall, the capital/labor ratio is lower than its pre-crisis level. This is also consistent with the fact that the share of capital-intensive sectors in GDP has shrunk substantially, and with the fact that investment underwent steeper declines than any other component of GDP. The capital/labor ratio will probably decline further once the conflict is over, since the labor market reacts faster than the accumulation of capital. Moreover, a return of refugees would cause further declines in the capital/labor ratio.

Under these circumstances, the immediate outcome of ending the conflict would most probably be a decline in the unemployment rate and an increase in GDP, but lower labor productivity and real wages. In order for the latter two to rise, the capital/labor ratio needs to rise. This adjustment requires high levels of investment, potentially facilitated by foreign aid.²⁰

Currently, the UN, the EU, the World Bank, and foreign governments are assisting Syria by providing aid to the Syrian government, or by directly helping Syrian IDPs, refugees, and other victims of the conflict. It is very

likely that these organizations and governments will continue to invest and provide aid to Syria once the conflict is over. It is also likely that Syria would ask for the assistance of the IMF or the World Bank. However, overall assistance thus far has been too limited to suffice. Given that foreign aid is dependent on donors' confidence and on political and economic conditions, it would probably take time before the Syrian economy would be provided with the required means for the monumental task of re-building.

Another adverse effect of the conflict, which has severe long run implications, is the fall in labor productivity, as a result of lost school years and unemployment. Poverty in Syria now exceeds 80 percent, with many children experiencing issues of food security. Unlike capital loss, it is hard to recover labor productivity. It is highly plausible that the generation of children who suffered through the war would remain a less productive generation.

The IMF's long run projection for the recovery of the Syrian economy assumes that a peace agreement and new government are in place by the end of 2017 and that conditions permit investors and international donors to safely engage in the country's rebuilding efforts. The IMF analysis states that "If we hypothetically assume that for Syria the post conflict rebuilding period will begin in 2018 and the economy grows at its trend rate of about 4 percent, it would take the country about 20 years to reach its pre-war real GDP level. ...This assumes that the country can quickly restore its production capacity and human capital levels and remains intact as a sovereign territory."²¹

Scenario 3: Multiple States and Economies

A discussion of the scenario of multiple states and economies invites an analysis of the economic resources of the different regions and the political entities that control them, along with their respective trading relations. Such analysis can help determine which regions may split and become autonomous states.

The government controls the greater Damascus area and the coastline. Damascus had a 40 percent share in most of the economic factors of production prior to the conflict, and the coastline is the region that suffered the lowest rates of destruction during the conflict. Moreover, the population in government-held regions is between 55 to 70 percent of the total Syrian population. The Syrian government has trading relations with Russia and Iran, and is assisted by aid from the UN and from Iran. Under the multiple

states scenario, it is possible that it would be assisted by more states and organizations. Therefore, under these circumstances, the government-held parts could rebuild and grow, if no further combat takes place.

If, however, most of the regions in which there are oil fields stay out of government reach, then its recovery process would take longer than under the scenario of a unified economy. The region of Aleppo has suffered major destruction. As it enjoyed a share of 30 percent in most of the factors of production prior to the conflict, control of Aleppo holds important implications for the government.

The Islamic State dominates large territories in Syria and in Iraq – though the areas under its control have diminished recently – but has a very small population under its control. On the one hand, it controls most of the regions in which there are oil fields and thus has sources of income. On the other hand, oil resources are generally running out, the Islamic State has no formal trading relations with any other entity (though the volume of clandestine trade is not clear), and it sells its oil at lower prices than global prices. Estimates put the Islamic State oil industry daily income at around \$3 million, giving it a total value of oil assets between \$1.3 and \$2 billion.²² Other sources of income for the Islamic State include:

- a. Taxation and extortion of residents: This form of income has a downside as well, because it imposes severe costs on the motivation to invest and causes a fall in labor productivity, as skilled workers try to escape Islamic State-dominated regions.
- b. The excavation and sale of cultural artifacts: It is very hard, though, to estimate the revenue this industry generates.
- c. Kidnapping ransom: It is estimated that revenues from ransom were between \$20-45 million in 2014.²³ This kind of activity may lead to foreign military intervention, which is destructive to the economy.
- d. Though the Islamic State receives no formal aid from international organizations, and although it faces embargoes and sanctions, it has a fundraising system, and it receives donations. It is estimated that the Islamic State accumulated as much as \$40 million between 2013-2014 from donors in the oil-rich nations of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait.²⁴ The organization approved a \$2 billion dollar budget for 2015, including a projected \$250 million dollar surplus, designed to cover the costs of operations in both Iraq and Syria.²⁵

The conclusion is that the Islamic State economy is heavily dependent on resources that are likely to run out in the medium or long term. Note that

oil was running out even before the conflict, the Islamic State lost control over major regions that have cultural artifacts, kidnapping for ransom risks foreign intervention, and taxation and extortion risk lower investment and cause skilled workers to flee. Therefore, if the Islamic State refrains from conflict with other entities, it could survive in the short run, but is not likely to survive in the long term if it does not create alliances and trade relations, establish traditional industries, and motivate its people to work and invest.

The Kurds control most of the northern frontier with Turkey. On the eastern part of the border is the governorate of Hasakeh, relatively rich with oil fields and cereal production. Sam Dagher, a correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*, quoted officials in the PYD-controlled part of Hasakeh as saying that fields in this region were producing 40,000 b/d in late 2014. This oil was sold to local Arab tribal groups for about \$15/barrel.²⁶ However, the Kurds are exposed to fighting with the Islamic State in Hasakeh. The Kurds hold alliances with the PKK in Turkey and with the KRG in Iraq, and are strongly opposed by Turkey. It is claimed that they have some arrangements with the Assad regime, which gave them control over the northern frontier and has trading relations with them.

Under these circumstances, it seems that the Kurds are dependent on oil resources that would not suffice in the long run, on agriculture that is vulnerable to volatile climate changes, on Assad's regime survival, and on the absence of Turkish intervention of the type seen in August and September 2016. These circumstances provide survival options in the short run, but demand structural changes and avoidance of future conflicts in the long run.

Economic data about the *National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary Opposition Forces* are hard to come by. The regions controlled by the Free Syrian Army are not rich in natural resources, and it seems that the rebel groups are heavily dependent on foreign aid. Therefore, without expanding, they would probably continue to be dependent on foreign aid. It is plausible that foreign governments would continue to assist them, but they would need to create autonomous sources of income in order to survive in the long run.

Conclusion

It may take the Syrian economy decades to recover to its initial pre-conflict position. Some damages look almost impossible to repair – people who fled the country may never come back; years of schooling are lost forever;

and the damage to physical capital and human capital is so enormous it will require probably hundreds of billions of dollars to rebuild. The IMF estimates 20 years of reconstruction. This means that under the best of circumstances Syria will need a very long period of time to regain the (poor) status it had before the civil war.

One can also assume that a unified Syria is a much more promising proposition than a fragmented one, at least in terms of economic rebuilding. This is particularly the case, as international aid will not be so readily given to those parts of a fragmented Syria that are anathema to the rest of the world, such as the Islamic State.

Notes

- 1 A general caveat applies throughout. Data and figures on Syria are incomplete and their reliability is questionable. Estimates are even worse. One needs to use what is available and proceed with due caution. Most data in this report are taken from the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR), which describes itself as follows: "The Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR) is an independent, non-governmental, and non-profit think tank, which undertakes public policy oriented research to bridge the gap between research and policy making process. SCPR aims to develop a participatory evidence-based policy dialogue to achieve policy alternatives that promote sustainable, inclusive, and human-centered development." See <http://scpr-syria.org/>.
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- 17 "Syria: Confronting Fragmentation! Impact of Syrian Crisis Report," p. 31.
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- 19 Jeanne Gobat and Kristina Kostial, "Syria's Conflict Economy," IMF Working Paper WP/16/123, Washington, International Monetary Fund, June 2016, p. 20, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp16123.pdf>. Unless noted otherwise, this will be the key reference to IMF citations here.
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- 22 Financial Action Task Force (FATF), "Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)," Paris, Financial Action Task Force, February 2015, pp. 14-15, <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Financing-of-the-terrorist-organisation-ISIL.pdf>.
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The UN Security Council, Israel, and “the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question”

Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky

In February 2017, newly appointed US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley expressed disdain for the UN bias toward Israel in general and for the stance of the UN Security Council (UNSC) vis-à-vis Israel in particular.¹ The anti-Israel sentiment in the UN derided poignantly by Ambassador Haley is not a recent development. Haley’s predecessor, for example, claimed that for as long as Israel has been a member of the UN, “it has been treated differently from other nations.”² Although Israel has learned to adapt to this dynamic, the reality underscores the strategic importance of Israel’s standing with the UN’s most powerful actors.

With this in mind, the current paper seeks to answer two central questions. First, how do the most powerful actors in the UN Security Council perceive the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the resolution of the conflict, and what, if any, are the differences of opinion between them? Second, in the Security Council discussions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which issues attract the most debate and fiercest criticism from these actors? The paper begins with a short section relating to the working apparatus of the UN Security Council vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the methodology adopted in this research. Findings to the two questions are then fleshed out, followed by an assessment and policy recommendations.

The UN Security Council and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The UN Security Council is mandated by the UN Charter to help maintain international peace and security. To this end, it is authorized to impose

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sanctions and permit the use of force. The Council comprises fifteen member states, five of which are permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – commonly known as the P5) and ten of which become members for a two-year period. While each member state has one vote, the five permanent members have the ability to veto the Council's decisions – granting them additional influence and power.

The Council meets on a regular basis to address conflicts across the globe. In addition to meetings under the agenda item “the situation in the Middle East,” the Council also convenes on a monthly basis, and at times more frequently, to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict under a special agenda item, “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.” These latter meetings follow a regular format, beginning with a brief by a high level UN official. In some meetings the floor opens for Council members to speak, vote on a resolution, or hold a discussion at the initiative of a Council member in reaction to a specific development.

The content of this paper is based on the analysis of seventy (n=70) UNSC meetings under agenda item “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” over a five-year period, from 2012 to 2016. With the aim of focusing attention on the most powerful actors in the Council, rather than on the biased rhetoric from states that are “automatically” antagonistic toward Israel (and with whom Israel has no diplomatic relations), the analysis covers only messages voiced by the following key players: P5 state representatives; the EU representative;³ and the UN official who opens each meeting. The starting point for the analysis is the year in which Palestine's status was upgraded from Non-Member Observer Entity to Non-Member Observer State.⁴ The importance of this development is twofold: first, the new status enhanced the Palestinians' ability to internationalize the conflict and take legal steps against Israel; and second, the move, which was not unanimously supported by key actors, illuminates the differences between them.

Perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict among the Key Actors

While in the current international climate the two-state solution to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been questioned by the new United States administration, every UNSC meeting reviewed was based upon the unshakable conviction of the key actors that “the two-State solution is the only viable scenario.”⁵ Throughout the period, key players noted that the “two-State solution...is the only way of bringing ...peace and security,”⁶

likewise noting that we are on the brink of a perilous situation in which “the two-State solution is on life support.”⁷

Two additional issues on which key players are unequivocally clear are that Israel has legitimate security concerns that must be addressed, and that direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are the best method to resolve the conflict.

As far as Israel’s security is concerned, the underlying principles that “there will be no progress if Israel’s legitimate security concerns are not addressed,”⁸ and that “Israel’s security...cannot be compromised”⁹ have been central to all discussions, with P5 states repeatedly noting that they “will never underestimate Israel’s security needs.”¹⁰ Israel’s security is discussed in Council sessions both with respect to Gaza, where “Israel’s right to self-defense...in responding to unacceptable rocket fire from Gaza”¹¹ is noted, and with respect to Palestinian terrorism and violence. The fact that Gaza is controlled by an “overtly anti-Semitic”¹² authority that “rejects peaceful solutions and aspires to the obliteration of Israel”¹³ has also been noted. In fact, in context of the international community’s awareness of Israel’s security concerns, two of the P5 states (United States and the United Kingdom) cited their “commitment to Israel’s security”¹⁴ as having propelled their vote in relation to UNSCR 2334.

With respect to bilateral negotiations as the best means to solve the conflict, there is a full consensus among the key players that “any eventual agreement must be developed by the Palestinians and the Israelis themselves, and not imposed externally,”¹⁵ and that international action is “not a substitute for a genuine peace process, which will need to be negotiated between both parties.”¹⁶ In this respect the key actors relate to the fact that the Palestinian pursuit of “legal international routes to statehood” must be supported by a realization that “there can be no substitute for negotiations with Israel,”¹⁷ and that even international action designed to “establish the framework for negotiations”¹⁸ in no way intends to “impose a solution on the parties.”¹⁹

Regarding the framework to facilitate resolution of the conflict, the key actors advocate extensive international involvement. This is evident both in their calls for greater involvement (e.g., “China appeals to the Quartet to take substantive action with a view to restarting the peace talks”²⁰) and in their ability to rally behind other actors when they take the lead on an issue. States that do take the lead underscore support received from other international players so that the picture that emerges is of an international community strongly supportive of proactive efforts channeled toward

resolving the conflict, regardless of which actor leads it. For example, “diplomatic effort would not have been possible without strong international support. The Arab Peace Initiative...committee, the Quartet envoys...the Secretary-General, European partners and others around the world also weighed in with strong statements of support.”²¹

Furthermore, all key actors support increasing the involvement of regional actors in resolving the conflict, particularly Arab League states, e.g., “We continue to believe that...countries of the region have a role to play.”²² The potential contribution of regional states is noted specifically in two aspects: first, as offering an incentive to Israel, and second, in facilitating “intra-Palestinian unity on the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization.”²³

In context of the turbulent Middle East, all key actors agree that other conflicts raging in the area should not deter the global community from acting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so that as “grave as the situation in Syria is,” for example, international actors “must not lose focus of the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”²⁴ In this respect, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is conceptualized as “a key ...to normalizing the situation in the region.”²⁵ In fact, there is a widespread perception that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is central not only to the parties themselves, or to the “the longer term stability of the Middle East region,”²⁶ but also to “peace and stability in...Europe.”²⁷

The differences between the key actors’ perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appear to be limited to the methodological realm of how best to encourage the sides to take positive steps toward a peace agreement. In this respect the United States stands apart from other players in its vocal criticism regarding unilateral Palestinian acts that the US perceives will “neither improve the daily lives of Palestinians nor foster...trust...towards a two-State solution.”²⁸ In line with this policy, in 2012 the United States voted against the Palestinian bid in the General Assembly to upgrade Palestine’s status, and in 2014 voted against the Jordanian resolution tabled in the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge.²⁹

Closest to the United States in rhetoric and action is the United Kingdom, which has been critical of unilateral Palestinian action in the diplomatic arena and which abstained both on the vote in the General Assembly in 2012 and on the vote on the Jordanian resolution in the Security Council in 2014 – this despite the fact that the UK noted its support for “the idea of a Security Council resolution on the Middle East peace process.”³⁰

The remaining P5 states (China, France, and Russia) appear to support greater international action vis-à-vis Israel, and as such voted in support of the Palestinian bid in the General Assembly in 2012, and the Jordanian resolution in 2014. Each has proposed additional mechanisms in pursuit of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement – most notably, a French initiative aimed to have “the entire international community proposing a positive agenda to the two parties to encourage them to move towards...peace”,³¹ a “four-point proposal on the...question of Palestine”³² put forth by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 and “the five-point proposal for peace”³³ presented by China in 2014; and Russia’s proposals that the Council should work towards a draft resolution including “the parameters for a cessation of the occupation,”³⁴ a Security Council mission to the Middle East,³⁵ and the integration of Arab League states into the Quartet.

Criticism from the UN and Key Council Members

The grievances toward Israel among the key Security Council actors relate primarily to the following issues:

- a. *Settlements*: Criticism regarding Israel’s settlement policies encompasses two issues: the ongoing expansion of settlements, and settlement-related violence. In opening Council sessions UN officials regularly provide figures on additional housing units approved by the Israeli government since the previous Council meeting. Such criticism is analytical, detailed, and fact-based, e.g., “We are deeply disappointed by Israeli...tenders for the construction of...450 residential units in West Bank settlements.”³⁶ In this context settlements are referred to as “counter to Israel’s...obligations,”³⁷ and “contrary to international law and an obstacle to peace,”³⁸ and they are said to “threaten the possibility of a two-State solution.”³⁹ On the more general level, Israel’s policy of expanding settlements is perceived as “an affront to the Palestinian people”⁴⁰ and as casting doubt on “Israel’s commitment to a two-State solution.”⁴¹

A second aspect of criticism relates to settlement-related violence. In earlier years, criticism related to bodily harm of Palestinians and Israelis alike, e.g., “46 Palestinians, including 12 children and one woman, were injured by settlers, while 11 settlers were injured by Palestinians”,⁴² as well as to the damage to Palestinian property and livelihood resulting from such violence, e.g., “Multiple incidents of settler attacks against Palestinian...orchards damaged over 1,080 trees

and saplings...concern given...olive-picking...livelihood for thousands of Palestinians."⁴³ In this respect, violence – both by Israeli settlers and against them – is perceived as being enabled “in the context of chronically inadequate law enforcement in the West Bank...created as a result of Israel’s decades-long policy of illegal settlement activities.”⁴⁴ More recently, settlement-related criticism drew attention to the perception that they are “the single-most damaging factor that contributes to the anger and frustration driving the violence”⁴⁵ against Israelis, both in the West Bank and in Israel proper.

- b. *Demolitions* are another issue drawing unabated criticism. UN officials regularly provide detailed statistics regarding the number of Palestinian structures demolished and the people who are displaced as a result, e.g., “33 residential structures were demolished...leading to the displacement of 176 Palestinians, including 78 children.”⁴⁶ Demolitions are particularly criticized regarding Israel’s policies in Area C, which limit Palestinian ability to “fair planning and zoning,”⁴⁷ leading to “the building of structures without an Israeli permit,”⁴⁸ which ultimately leads to their demolition.
- c. *Prisoners*: The issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israel surfaced particularly between 2013 and 2015, in relation to the detention of Palestinians without trial for prolonged periods. For example, “those held in administrative detention without charge should...face trial...in accordance with international standards, or be promptly released.”⁴⁹ In this context concern was repeatedly voiced regarding “the health of...Palestinian prisoners on ongoing hunger strike protesting their administrative detention.”⁵⁰
- d. *Search-and-arrest operations in the West Bank*: Until 2016, the number of Israel’s operations in the West Bank was reported regularly, including the consequent injuries and fatalities on both sides, e.g., “Israeli security forces conducted 477 operations in the West Bank...an increase from previous months, resulting in 185 Palestinians, including eight children, being injured, while two Israeli soldiers were...injured.”⁵¹ While such operations are noted, there is no explanation as to the rationale behind carrying them out. Occasionally there is mention that “Israeli security forces reported having foiled ...terrorist attacks... allegedly planned by individuals in the West Bank”,⁵² however such developments are not immediately linked to the search-and-arrest operations.

- e. *Israel's withholding of Palestinian tax revenues*: During the period assessed, Israel resorted to a freeze of Palestinian tax revenues in two instances in response to Palestinian unilateral action in the diplomatic arena. In 2012, the withholding of Palestinian tax revenues was in response to the Palestinian bid in the General Assembly, and in 2015 it was a reaction to President Abbas's signing "instruments of accession to 18 international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court."⁵³ In both instances, Israel's policy of freezing tax monies received extensive criticism and was noted as casting "doubt upon Israeli compliance with Paris Protocol provisions."⁵⁴ This policy was particularly criticized in 2012 when the Palestinians faced "a dire fiscal situation," and Israel's withholding of the funds was considered to imperil "the considerable achievements made by the Palestinian Authority in recent years."⁵⁵
- f. *Rhetoric*: While this is a central grievance directed to the Palestinian side, inflammatory Israeli rhetoric is occasionally criticized by key players referring to both the Israeli leadership and grassroots levels. On the leadership level, for example, "Israel's Prime Minister portraying those who oppose settlement expansion as supporters of ethnic cleansing" was deemed "unacceptable and outrageous" by the Secretary General himself.⁵⁶ Other problematic rhetoric mentioned in Council meetings included that of Israeli ministers who "say publicly that there will be no Palestinian State."⁵⁷ With respect to grassroots elements, "the impact of social media and irresponsible rhetoric"⁵⁸ was said to play a "dramatic role in the escalation"⁵⁹ of events on the ground, for which "both sides have much to be blamed."⁶⁰
- g. *Legislation*: The introduction of changes to Israeli law was criticized in 2015 and 2016 on the following issues: "force-feeding of a hunger-striking prisoner" (2015);⁶¹ the amendment of Israel's penal code "to increase harsh punishments for throwing stones at moving vehicles" (2015);⁶² "the applicability of Israel's 1951 absentee property law to Palestinian property in East Jerusalem when the owner is in the West Bank" (2015);⁶³ "the NGO Transparency Law, which contributes to a climate in which...human rights organizations are delegitimized" (2016);⁶⁴ and "legalization...of outposts deep in the West Bank" (2016).⁶⁵ The legalization of outposts was also cited by the United States as a catalyst in abstaining on UNSCR 2334.⁶⁶

h. *Gaza*: While key actors in the Council are sympathetic to Israel's security concerns, there is a broad consensus that Israel's policies with respect to Gaza must be substantially changed. In this respect key actors are "seriously concerned about the humanitarian situation in ...Gaza,"⁶⁷ and about "several United Nations relief projects...awaiting Israeli approval."⁶⁸ "Changing Israeli policy with regard to the Gaza Strip and ending the blockade"⁶⁹ are perceived as imperative for strengthening "support for peace among a population that...lives under the exclusive yoke of Hamas."⁷⁰ Particularly problematic to key actors is Israel's restrictions on the "import of goods defined as having a dual use."⁷¹ While this policy is understood in light of "Israel's legitimate security concerns,"⁷² it is nevertheless criticized, given that "the United Nations remains ready, with other Quartet partners, to help...define agreed modalities for the secure transfer and use of such materials."⁷³ While key actors display frustration at the situation in Gaza (e.g., "Why should the international community spend billions of dollars rebuilding Gaza when there is no guarantee that it will not be destroyed again within a few years?"⁷⁴), the ultimate ability to solve the situation is not thrust on Israel alone but also on the inability to restore Palestinian unity.

In relating to criticism aimed at the Palestinians, three primary issues can be pinpointed. The first is the situation in Gaza, which draws heavy criticism regarding internal governance issues on the one hand and violent conduct aimed at Israel on the other. The second is incitement, at both the leadership and the grassroots level. As such, the Palestinian leadership's failure "to condemn specific attacks or ...the praise heaped upon the perpetrators"⁷⁵ is emphasized. The UK and the US have voiced the most criticism in this field. The third issue is the absence of Palestinian unity, which is perceived as "central to realizing a two-State solution,"⁷⁶ to the point where "restoring Palestinian unity on the platform of the Palestinian Liberation Organization"⁷⁷ has been termed "the most important issue on the agenda."⁷⁸

Assessment and Policy Recommendations

The analysis shows that the P5 states, EU representatives, and high level UN officials share more points of agreement than points of contention with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although they differ in their perceptions regarding beneficial mechanisms needed to encourage the parties to the conflict to take positive steps on the ground, key outside

actors are in agreement regarding the preferred framework for solving the conflict; the importance of engaging in efforts to resolve the conflict despite other – far deadlier – conflicts in the region; and the positive impact that resolving the conflict will have on the region.

Israel can be assured that there is a sober awareness of the state's security concerns, which are fully legitimized; there is unanimous support for urging Arab League states to support more closely and participate in the political process; and there is a consensus that only a negotiated agreement between Israelis and Palestinians – and not a solution imposed by the international community – will bring an end to the conflict.

At the same time, a number of issues warrant Israel's attention. For example, the harsh rhetoric and international frustration elicited by Israel's detention of prisoners without trial for prolonged periods and its withholding Palestinian tax revenues should be factored in alongside any advantages these measures may produce. In addition, the international resonance of what Israel may perceive as domestic action, particularly inflammatory rhetoric and legislative changes, should be monitored. Indeed, during 2015 and 2016 alone, Israel was criticized about five laws, with the last of these – legalization of settlement outposts – cited by the Americans in their decision to abstain on UNSCR 2334.

Moreover, a thorough reassessment should be carried out regarding the three issues raised persistently throughout the entire period. The first is Israel's policy of settlement expansion. The corollary to key actors' perception that only a negotiated agreement will end the conflict is the expectation that neither side will take unilateral steps on the ground to undermine the prospects of a negotiated agreement. As such, key actors repeatedly express disappointment at Israel's conduct. The settlement policy is criticized not only because the regular approval of new housing units is seen to undermine the feasibility of the two-state solution, but also because of the related impact of settler-related violence and Israel's search-and-arrest operations in the West Bank. There is a gaping divide between the way Israel views its settlement policy and the way key international actors perceive it. If Israel cannot or will not change this policy, it needs to propose an alternative paradigm for solving the conflict in the face of ongoing settlement expansion.

The second issue is Israel's policy of demolitions in Area C, which is related to the dearth of building permits issued to Palestinians in this area. This policy is an ongoing source of international aggravation, as

it is perceived as inflicting collective and unnecessary suffering on the Palestinian population. As with settlements, the policy of demolishing structures in Area C contributes toward the international perception that Israel has no intention of making the necessary compromises needed to resolve the conflict.

The third issue is Israel's restriction on the transfer of goods to and from Gaza. While criticism on this latter point appears to be somewhat cushioned by the legitimization of Israel's security concerns on the one hand, and continued criticism of the Palestinian Authority, which has not succeeded in forming a unity government on the other – the fact that the situation in Gaza surfaces regularly in Council sessions raises two flags. First: the situation in Gaza is perceived as unsustainable. Second: it is Israel that is seen as having the ultimate ability to (at least partially) ease the situation in Gaza. Signs of frustration, owing in part to the recurrent need to provide international funding for reconstruction in Gaza, signify that should another full-scale round of violence between Israel and Hamas develop – even if clearly instigated by the Palestinian side – there will be less international tolerance for the eventual destruction that will be incurred by Israeli retaliation. Israel should thus seriously weigh alternative policies for the situation in Gaza.

Given Israel's conduct and the reaction of key actors in the Security Council, the question is whether Israel can produce an alternative paradigm to solve the conflict that will receive international – and Palestinian – backing. Unless and until such an alternative is clearly and publicly presented, policies that appear to undermine the internationally favored two-state paradigm will inevitably contribute to the erosion of Israel's international standing among its most important strategic partners.

Notes

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The F-35 and Israel's Security Concept

Ilan Shklarsky

In August 2010, then-Israel's Minister of Defense Ehud Barak decided to adopt the IDF recommendation to purchase the F-35 as the air force's future combat aircraft. The aircraft, which is advancing rapidly toward operational status in Israel, is expected to cope with difficult challenges on the future regional battlefield, including both "new" military conflicts with sub-state, hybrid, and "invisible" enemies that have adapted themselves to the globalization era, and revolutionary technologies possessed by advanced armies that have succeeded in changing the approach to the use of force in military conflicts. Since that decision in 2010, much has occurred in the region likely to affect Israel's security concept, and consequently its force buildup. In the meantime, the first fifth generation warplane of its type has arrived in the Middle East – the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter ("Adir," in Hebrew), which is likely to serve the air force in the coming decades. Is the F-35 suited to Israel's security concept, and if so, in all aspects?

The F-35 Project

There are three models of the fifth generation combat aircraft F-35: A, B, and C.¹ The Ministry of Defense has purchased model A planes, and will install advanced Israeli capabilities in them. Thirty-three aircraft were ordered at \$110 million per plane, and the cabinet recently approved the purchase of 17 additional planes. Due to the high price, this is the most expensive global weapons project in history (with a projected cost of \$1.5 trillion).²

The F-35 is a unique aircraft with innovative and advanced capabilities,³ such as a high standard of independent defense, based on the plane's shape and stealth materials that give it a low radar cross-section and enable it

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to avoid detection by radar. Furthermore, the aircraft has an independent electro-optical system with high quality sensors (a distributed aperture system) that provide the pilot with a defense and warning space around the aircraft that can alert as to threats, missiles, and planes, and improve his situation awareness. The plane's interception capabilities are among the best in the world: its F135 engine makes it powerful, and it is equipped with an active electrically scanned array (AESA). It has the integrative ability to carry heat and radar-guided AIM-9X air-to-air missiles (AMRAAM) and a helmet-mounted display system (HMDS) with a 360-degree display. The aircraft also has unique air-to ground attack capabilities, because it is able to carry a large number of types of advanced armaments, and thus independently close intelligence circles for attack.

Process of Force Buildup

The procurement process is of great importance in force buildup. In the case of the IDF, the process is extensive and especially complex, because Israel lacks strategic depth. Decision makers must therefore establish principles for force buildup that will provide an optimal solution for the array of challenges on the various fronts. Resources are limited, and based on calculated risks, the IDF must take decisions and give certain equipment priority over others. For example, an additional purchase of Iron Dome launchers and missiles is likely to provide better defense for the Israeli home front, but at the same time does not improve the IDF's attack capabilities at all, and in effect comes at their expense. In other words, the total aggregate procurement is what is important.

The Compatibility of the F-35 to the Security Concept

This essay assesses the compatibility of the F-35 with the Israeli security concept early in the 21st century. The parameters for the analysis are based on the defense doctrine, IDF strategy, and the elements of possible conflicts: deterrence, advance warning, defense, technological and intelligence supremacy, a limited campaign, all-out war, and a campaign between wars. Each of these seven criteria will be analyzed from a critical perspective of the F-35 aircraft, its contribution, and its capability. Following an analysis of each parameter, the findings will be summarized and assessed.

Deterrence

Deterrence affects the enemy's intentions, which inter alia are influenced by its relative capabilities. In other words, the fact that Israel has acquired a fifth generation stealth aircraft changes the strategic balance in the Middle East. As a result, some of the regional actors are likely to think twice before embarking on a military campaign against an enemy with innovative capabilities such as those possessed by the F-35.

Who is the object of this possible deterrence, and is general deterrence involved, or is it aimed at a specific actor? The issue is complex, because Israel is capable of enhancing its military force with advanced technologies, yet the latest aircraft has no influence on the "lone wolf" terrorism phenomenon,⁴ for example. It is unlikely that a potential lone wolf will consider the F-35's capabilities when deciding to carry out some terrorist operation. On the other hand, an organization like Hezbollah, which wants to damage Israeli warplanes, is likely to take the F-35's stealth capabilities into account when assessing the feasibility of going to war. Similarly, regular armies – the few remaining in the Middle East since the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the collapse of nation-state frameworks – are expected to weigh the implications of a fifth generation aircraft in the hands of enemies or rivals. Without any doubt, the effectiveness of deterrence depends in part on the type of enemy.

State and semi-state armies are the principal addresses for this deterrence, because they are liable to actually experience the aircraft's relative advantages on the battlefield. Terrorist organizations, on the other hand, however significant they may be, might well ignore the F-35's existence, because their war is waged largely in the sphere of consciousness, rather than on the aerial technological battlefield; and because the balance of deterrence is different for them. It was argued in the past that adopting a strategy of deterrence towards terrorist organizations and sub-state entities, such as Hamas in the Gaza Strip, is more complicated and difficult to implement than deterrence against countries. As an organization is increasingly established and behaves more like a state, however, with general responsibility for the population (like Hezbollah, for example), the chances that deterrence against it will succeed are greater.⁵ Israeli deterrence will therefore become stronger, although not necessarily against all actors.

The fact that Israel has acquired a fifth generation stealth aircraft changes the strategic balance in the Middle East.

Currently and in the very near future, Israeli will be the only country in the Middle East equipped with fifth generation aircraft, a fact that gives Israel an exclusive qualitative advantage for the time being. Turkey, on the other hand, is slated to receive its first F-35 in 2018, and plans to procure 100 of the aircraft in the coming decade.⁶ Furthermore, other countries in the region are likely to buy the plane in the future, and if not the F-35, then a similar fifth generation aircraft, such as the Chinese Chengdu-J20, the Russian Sukhoi T-50, and the like. The Russian and Chinese aircraft are generally inferior to the American planes, but if they reach certain countries, such as Iran, they are certainly liable to prove challenging to Israel. The number of F-35 planes possessed by Israel is therefore also significant in order to strengthen deterrence.

Advance Warning

The concept of advance warning refers to the intelligence community's efforts to detect the enemy's intentions correctly. Based on David Ben-Gurion's classic concept, advance warning is designed first and foremost to provide the IDF with the time it needs to call up reserves when necessary. At the same time, in contrast to the classic advance warning, which deals mainly with detecting intentions to go to war, deterrence in the 21st century during the "third period" (referring to the period since the end of the twentieth century, with the increase in wars against non-state actors) according to Prof. Isaac Ben Israel also requires a focus on obtaining intelligence about individual targets in order to use force precisely and effectively.⁷ Advance warning is therefore intelligence for war, intelligence for defense, and intelligence for attack.

The F-35 has intelligence systems and sensors for advance detection that provide intelligence for attack, advance tactical warning, and intelligence gathering. The aircraft's advanced systems enable stealth fighter pilots to communicate directly with ground controllers, call for assistance, direct forces, and issue far more precise warnings about threats than can be provided by the currently available tools. According to General Gary L. North, in addition to being a warplane, the F-35 is also a flying internet system capable of handling large and diverse quantities of data from the battlefield and providing a system-wide picture for control, ground forces, and other military forces.⁸

The contribution of the F-35 to advance warning is quite significant, but precision is important. The aircraft makes no substantial contribution

to Ben-Gurion's concept of advanced warning of war. By itself, the plane will find it difficult to issue advance warning that any particular army is planning a war against Israel. It can be assumed, however, that operational advance warning can be streamlined in the F-35 era through its advanced sensors and processors, thereby contributing to deterrence during the "third period" – obtaining intelligence about individual targets that facilitates the effective use of force.

Defense

The defensive dimension of Israel's security concept is newer than other dimensions. In the past, military planners in Israel preferred to develop flexible offensive capabilities in order to cope with strategic threats, rather than focusing on efforts at defense. Today, it is clear that defense constitutes a decisive factor in the security of the state, and it plays a significant role in the defense establishment's considerations.

The professional literature focuses its efforts on active defense, mainly in the air defense array. This comes as no surprise, given the nature of the conflict, the enemy's war strategy, and the resulting threat to the Israeli home front. The F-35's role in defense against missiles will be extremely minimal, but a broader perspective is nevertheless required.

Defense is also required against enemy aircraft, land forces, cyber threats, and more – not just against missiles. The F-35's contribution to defense is therefore divided between two separate layers that jointly provide a complete solution. First, the F-35's air-to-air and stealth capabilities enable the aircraft to carry out the air force's primary mission – defending the nation's skies against hostile aircraft – in an optimal way. The F-35's stealth capabilities are likely to constitute an advantage in this mission, especially in air combat beyond eyesight range (it is liable to be inferior in dogfights). Second, the aircraft's intelligence capabilities will enable it to close attack circles and hit rocket launchers, thereby damaging the enemy's attack, and consequently strengthening Israeli defense. The F-35's contribution to defense is therefore definitely substantial.

Technological and Intelligence Superiority

Israel customarily invests in quality personnel and technology, in order to overcome quantitative inferiority. The F-35 was designed explicitly to provide its owners with technological superiority, such as stealth, air-to-air, and attack capabilities; according to the aircraft's specifications, it is

currently among the best in the world in all of these aspects. The air and land threats that Israel faces are changing, and in response, Israel must always remain one step ahead of its enemies. In effect, technological superiority is what enables aircraft on the new battlefield to carry out their missions effectively. Because of its stealth capabilities, advanced air-to-air missiles, and independent defense systems, the F-35 is regarded as an aircraft that bestows air superiority.

The combination of the systems, stealth, and the aircraft's performance yielded impressive results in American exercises and training. In one exercise, 10 planes were "downed," compared with no stealth fighters downed;⁹ in another exercise, F-35 planes "destroyed" the F-15E planes sent against them.¹⁰ There is a clear trend in which fifth generation stealth aircraft enjoy unequivocal superiority over their fourth generation opponents, and not only in the air. In the context of attacks against ground targets, the F-35's immunity enables it to reach threatened areas without being detected, and to attack targets by utilizing independently gathered intelligence information. In other words, this warplane is capable of carrying out operations that formerly required an entire air and land system.

Limited Campaign

Israel's current approach to the use of force against its enemies is sometimes described as "mowing the lawn" – a new term in the Israeli strategic nomenclature, reflecting the assumption that Israel is in an unsolvable ongoing conflict against hostile non-state entities.¹¹ The F-35's contribution to limited conflicts lies in two principal areas: first, the ability to attack targets while avoiding detection. The aircraft is capable of carrying two half-ton bombs, while preserving its stealth capability.¹² In certain scenarios, such as a possible conflict against Hezbollah in the north, the ability to remain airborne in a threatened area can improve the air force's effectiveness, despite the drawback that the quantity of munitions that can be carried in a stealth configuration is limited. Second, intelligence for attack and advance warning, as described at length in the preceding sections, is essential in the case of a limited conflict with a high degree of uncertainty. Every bit of intelligence, whether for defense or offense, is of importance in preventing the enemy from attaining its objectives. The conclusions indicate that the F-35 is likely to contribute relevant capabilities in a limited conflict scenario. At the same time, the capabilities are not revolutionary, because the nature of a limited conflict and the complicated strategic discourse accompanying

it depend on more than just capabilities. The operational capabilities are not necessarily the gap, rather, the combination of intentions and capabilities of each side in the conflict and the violent interface accompanying it. A unique operational contribution therefore does not necessarily change the strategic balance in a limited conflict.

All-Out War

As of 2017, the reference scenario for a large scale Israeli conflict involves a multi-front and multi-dimensional scenario against sub-state, irregular, or semi-irregular organizations on Israel's borders, with an emphasis on the northern border and the threat from Hezbollah. The F-35 is capable of making many contributions in an all-out multi-theater scenario. According to a study conducted for the American air force concerning the future battlefield and its challenges,¹³ it is clear that air technological superiority will be essential in order to provide a solution for the challenges of a future war. In addition, rapid integrated intelligence gathering, processing, and analysis capabilities will be needed to make operational decisions on the dynamic battlefield. Accordingly, it can be argued that the F-35 is also capable of contributing to the Israeli air force in current, and mainly future, all-out wars. The F-35's unique technologies are adapted to the future battlefield, and therefore the aircraft is capable of generating a turnaround in all matters pertaining to air combat in an uncertain large scale war, and is likely to improve the chances of victory.

Campaign between Wars

According to the IDF strategy, the unstable strategic environment, with many regional actors and mutual deterrence against war, leads Israel to operate below the escalation threshold in order to weaken the negative armed groups, limit the enemies' buildup of forces, create optimal conditions for victory in a future war, generate legitimacy for Israeli action, and detract from the legitimate basis for enemy action – all for the purpose of delaying the next war as much as possible.¹⁴ Operating below the escalation threshold is especially important, because Israel is capable of striking the enemy even without the F-35, but operating below the escalation threshold makes the task much more difficult.

Thanks to its stealth, intelligence, technological, and network capabilities, the F-35 is an excellent aircraft for missions below the escalation threshold.

The F-35's stealth capability of seeing without being seen is likely to improve concealment, thereby minimizing Israel's signature in future operations. In this context, the great advantage of the aircraft is its stealth and the integration between its systems for navigation and locating and identifying targets: its radar makes it possible to obtain an accurate picture of the territory and thwart the enemy's defense measures. The range of its electro-optical systems makes the F-35 fitter for clandestine attack operations. Furthermore, intelligence is a strong point of the F-35, and is extremely significant in closing an intelligence circle for attack in missions about which there is little certainty. Thanks to its stealth, intelligence, technological, and network capabilities, the F-35 is an excellent aircraft for missions below the escalation threshold.

Comparative Assessment

Table 1. F-35 Capabilities and Contribution to Israel's Security Concept

Type of Campaign	Deterrence	Advance Warning	Defense	Limited Conflict	All-Out War	Campaign between Wars
Feature of the F-35						
Air-to-air capabilities	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x
Offensive capabilities	✓	x	x	x	✓	±
Technological and intelligence capabilities	✓	✓	✓	±	✓	✓
Stealth	✓	x	✓	±	✓	✓

✓ = Excellent solution ± Medium solution x = Inadequate response

Clearly the F-35's most significant contribution is likely in an all-out war and deterrence. Its relative advantages will stand out in a large scale conflict scenario in which all the political obstacles are removed, and the presence of the Israeli aircraft as the only one of its kind in the theater (to date) will enhance deterrence as perceived by enemies.

The most marginal contribution of the F-35 is in a limited conflict. It is believed that its unique capabilities will not have a great effect in a limited and restricted campaign. Thus had Israel been equipped with F-35 aircraft during Operation Protective Edge in 2014, the plane would presumably not

have materially changed the conflict. In asymmetric warfare against terrorist groups in urban areas, the F-35 will probably not have a far reaching effect.

Advance warning is another aspect of the security concept where the F-35 is of limited use. Its technological and intelligence capabilities provide advance tactical warning during a battle, for example, warning about moving a battery of land-to-air missiles that has begun to broadcast, or gathering intelligence about an attack. On the other hand, given the fact that the aircraft's other capabilities provide no solution for advance warning, and since there is no broad advance warning of a war (in the classic sense), this solution is far from complete.

Two other elements analyzed are defense and conflict between wars, and the F-35 will make a prominent contribution in both of them. Regarding defense, most of the aircraft's capabilities are highly rated. From stealth to excellent technologies providing air superiority, the F-35 will improve the defense of Israel's skies against most aircraft. Nevertheless, the contribution to active defense against high trajectory rocket weapons is marginal, and the F-35's expected response to this will be solely in detecting and attacking a launcher (a minimal accomplishment in comparison with the number of guns and the fact that what is involved is probably a responsive and not a preventive attack).

A conflict between wars is extremely significant for Israel. The F-35's important contribution in this aspect is its intelligence gathering capability using its array of sensors and stealth flying that that makes it possible to carry out a mission without exposure. At the same time, in comparison with fourth generation aircraft possessed by the Israeli air force, the F-35's attack capabilities in a conflict between wars give it an only a medium advantage over the existing alternatives.

Criticism

Three main criticisms appear in the literature. The first alleges that the number of malfunctions in the plane is unreasonable and makes it operationally unfit. The second alleges that because the aircraft is designed for a broad range of missions according to the multi-tasking principle, it has lost the basic capabilities of a warplane (in an attempt to achieve too much), and is therefore in some respects inferior to the alternatives. Third, the F-35 carries a very high price tag, and it was proposed instead, for example, to buy thousands of advanced remotely controlled aircraft.

It appears that the first criticism does not deviate from criticism of comparable past projects, and it should be assumed that the malfunctions will be corrected. An aircraft becomes operational through a natural process. In this context, for example, the *Defense News* website issued a warning about the F-35's ejection seat, claiming that its performance is inadequate for pilots weighing 47-62 kilograms (the reports indicate a 20 percent probability of death in an escape from the plane for this weight category).¹⁵ The report unquestionably conveys severe criticism, but the problem will presumably be corrected, because many warplanes had problems early in their development. For example, the Israeli Baz (Falcon-F-15A/B/C/D) had escape problems and pilots lost their lives in escape accidents over the years. The system was later fixed, however, and the problems have now been solved. In response to the criticism, Lockheed Martin publicly stated that despite the problems appearing in various reports, 50,000 flying hours proved that there were no terrible failures or serious events in the development of the F-35 project, in contrast to most past projects.¹⁶

The second criticism regards the F-35's basic capabilities in comparison with fourth or 4.5 generation aircraft. The argument is that the great efforts made to perfect the plane have come at the cost of key capabilities required in battle. In the past, F-35 test pilots expressed concern about its capability in close combat, because its maneuvering abilities were inferior to those of faster warplanes (such as the F-16).¹⁷ This dilemma always exists – between advanced technologies and innovative systems that add weight and drag to the airplanes versus lightness and simplicity that enable an airplane to maneuver nimbly in close air battles. It is very likely that the maneuverability will be less important in future combat than technological superiority and stealth. The F-35's air superiority is designed to deal with air threats at long range in order to avoid close air combat requiring sharp maneuvering. This does not differ from the Falcon, which maneuvers better than the F-15I Ra'am (Thunder), a succeeding model, because two excellent Israeli strategic attack capabilities and air systems were added to the latter. Air forces rely on a broad range of tools and capabilities; no single aircraft is capable of winning a conflict by itself. The solution lies in integration of different set-ups and means in order to handle the array of threats. Partly for this reason, remote-controlled aircraft and 4.5 generation aircraft are inadequate substitutes for the F-35.

The third point is the financial aspect: that the project is indeed very expensive is indisputable. Since the project began in 2001, the price per plane

has skyrocketed by 97 percent.¹⁸ At the same time, according to the project's official website, the projected maintenance costs for the 55 years of the F-35 plan dropped 22 percent in 2013. From a long term perspective, including maintenance and spare parts prices, the projected price is reasonable, in comparison with the alternatives. Furthermore, the cost of the aircraft in 2018 for delivery to the buyer in 2020 is slated to be \$85 million.¹⁹

The latter two arguments – concerning the cost and exaggerated perfection – are not new. The F-22 Raptor is a plane owned only by the United States; Congress does not allow it to be exported. The F-22 is currently the “most lethal fighter ever.”²⁰ Nevertheless, the harsh criticism it drew from its opponents was not different from the criticism of the F-35. In 2013, an article was published describing the criticism of the Raptor as absurd, and saying that despite the aircraft's stealth capabilities and technologies, and even though it had complete air superiority, its high price was criticized in comparison with its limited capability (the same criticism made of the F-35).²¹

Conclusion and Recommendations

Israel purchased the F-35 for battle purposes in a complex environment, utilizing its stealth and technological advantages. It is expected to be included in all air force missions and on all war fronts as the leading aircraft of its type in the world, and this will require a process of adaptation and adjustment on all levels. A historical assessment shows that in combat, warplanes have not necessarily performed the missions for which they were designated in the original plan in the production stage, and this is even truer of airplanes built during peacetime. For example, it can be seen how the classic missions of the F-16s and F-15s in air-to-air combat have lost weight with the passage of time, to be replaced by various types of attack missions. It is hard to predict exactly how the F-35 will contribute, because we do not know what future wars will be like. Nevertheless, according to air warfare experts, it will be one of the world's leading tools for the next 50 years.²²

Judging by the F-35's planned capabilities and in actual tests, and in accordance with the security concept, IDF strategy, and an analysis of regional wars, the main contributions expected from the F-35 are victory in an all-out war and in deterrence. Furthermore, it is expected to make a medium-to-good

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contribution in campaigns between wars and in defense. On the other hand, for reasons explained above, the F-35 is expected to make little contribution to advanced warning and in a limited conflict. Many financial and technological difficulties emerged during the project, with timetables postponed, and it remains to be hoped that it will meet all the requirements promised by the manufacturers. At the same time, despite its advantages, the aircraft is not a panacea for Israel's defense problems, and most of its missions can be performed using fourth generation aircraft.²³ However, as this essay has pointed out, the aircraft possesses innovations likely to prove significant on the battlefield; despite the many criticisms of the project, the F-35 stands to prove highly worthwhile. Since no alternative is capable of providing a similar solution for these questions, the decision by the Minister of Defense in 2010 to buy the F-35 indeed serves Israel's security concept well.

Notes

- 1 Model A is the conventional model, model B is for short takeoffs and vertical landings, and model C for aircraft carriers.
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- 8 Judah Ari Gross, "If the F-35 Fighter Jet is so Awesome, Why is it so Hated?" *Times of Israel*, April 6, 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/if-the-f-35-fighter-jet-is-so-awesome-why-is-it-so-hated/>.
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- 21 "F-22: Capabilities and Controversies," *Defense Industry Daily*, November 2013.
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